

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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THE WORD OF THE CROSS

1 Corinthians 1:17, 18

DCB I wondered if we could have help together in considering “the word of the cross”. Each one of us who has trusted the Lord Jesus has had an appreciation of the cross. We have come there, we could say, as sinners, and found relief. But “the word of the cross” would apply to us as believers. I think the Spirit of God would lead us to the cross, so that “the word of the cross” applies to persons who are believers and who have the Spirit. So “the word of the cross” is to have its result and effect with us. There were particular challenges, as we know, in Corinth. Paul had experience there, and we know from chapter 2, verse 2, his experience among them; he said, “I did not judge it well to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and *him* crucified”. It is not just 'Jesus Christ crucified'; it is the Person Himself in His attractiveness. But then, anticipating the conditions to arise in Corinth, he knew the need was “*him* crucified”. In the crucifixion there was an end of what was according to us and according to man and flesh. So that he could say in chapter 1, verse 23, of the preaching, “but we preach Christ crucified”. His preaching related to that Man, and what that means is that what there was that was characteristic of Jew or Greek was ended. “Jews indeed ask for signs, and Greeks seek wisdom.” There was something that was not going to satisfy Jews in seeking signs, or Greeks seeking wisdom, but something that is a different line finishing what there is of these natural tendencies: “Christ, God's power and God's wisdom”. It was needed in the condition of things in Corinth, and it is needed to meet that for God's glory. Having brought that in, and given a basis in his service in these epistles to Corinth in the cross, he progresses, moves on, and does not directly refer to the cross again until at the very end of the second epistle. In 2 Corinthians 13 he makes reference to the fact that “he has been crucified in weakness”, verse 4. So the whole of the ministry to the Corinthians is contained within these references to the crucifixion of Christ, and that in particular in weakness.

Now he has a different challenge in Galatians, and again, and you could say even more extensively, he applies “the word of the cross”. But before looking at that I think something of the progression in his soul comes in. You think of the one direct reference in Romans. It is quite remarkable to me that there is only one reference to the crucifixion in the epistle to the Romans. You would think that as it is the gospel

epistle there would be other references. But where it comes in is even after the division in Romans 5: 12, when the epistle begins to speak of the need of dealing with the matter of sin. So that it comes in in Romans 6, "For if we are become identified with him in the likeness of his death, so also we shall be of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with him, that the body of sin might be annulled, that we should no longer serve sin", v 5, 6. And Romans, of course, brings matters to our experience. This is something of what God has done, that "our old man has been crucified". What there was that served and was associated with sin has been finished there, and that really is a background to the way in which Paul approaches matters in Galatians. It is one thing, you could say, to say, "our old man has been crucified"; but what he says when he comes to Galatians is, 'I am crucified'. "I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me", Gal 2: 20. And that was to such an extent in Paul that he could, as I understand it, suggest that "Jesus Christ has been portrayed, crucified among you", in himself, chap 3: 1. They could see the effect of the crucifixion. Think of what Paul was according to the flesh, and the abilities and the place that he had, Pharisee of the Pharisees, and all these kind of things, and it is crucified. And again applying the matter, he says something interesting in chapter 5, verse 24, "they that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh", that is they themselves doing something. "But they that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts", a necessary matter; and he would say as he goes on, "the world is crucified to me, and I to the world", Gal 6: 14. Another feature that he brings in in Galatians is "the scandal of the cross", chap 5: 11. There was weakness in the cross, there was scandal in the cross: what it meant to the believers to be associated with a crucified Man! He was concerned about "the scandal of the cross", that the whole scope of reproach should not be done away. The Galatians would have made something of man as he is.

Now there are touches in the other epistles. Philippians brings us that very blessedly familiar scripture where he speaks of the Lord Jesus "becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross" (chap 2: 8), the severity and depth of it. And along with that Colossians makes the reference to the cross, "having made peace by the blood of his cross" (chap 1: 20); these two features of the blood and the cross brought together, which would help us in what has been

brought before us in the hymn, No 155, which suggests that love is the motive in all actions of divine Persons. We can get technical or complex about some of these things in doctrine but there is nothing that is purely doctrinal in Christianity; everything is a matter of affection. "The blood of his cross" suggests the depth of affection that was there; "That the death of the cross" that there is a Person who has loved us so much that He has gone to the cross for us. How that should affect our spirits as we consider the matter.

For a final reference, Ephesians brings the cross in once. The cross is to have an effect, "might reconcile both", that is Jew and Gentile, "in one body to God by the cross, having by it slain the enmity". Chap 2: 16. The cross is to have that effect, that what there is that would cause disparity or diversion has been removed because both these persons and characters, the Jew and the Gentile, have been removed, so that we can have a new walk that is according to God. These are not all, but they are most of, the references in Paul's ministry to the cross or to what is crucified. It is not something which he dwells on extensively, but he brings it in because there is a constant need, whatever our condition is, for us to be brought back to - or never to leave - the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps we could have help in considering it together.

JSG I wanted to ask why in the scripture read in 1 Corinthians 1, wisdom and understanding, and the scribe and the wise and the wisdom of the world are immediately referred to in the context of its being brought in, v 19, 20.

DCB We began with the reference to Paul's preaching, "to preach glad tidings; not in wisdom of word". I suppose we would all tend to wish to add something of ourselves and our own ability if we are engaged in speaking. It is the natural tendency and he has to present to us that nothing of human ability, nothing of human wisdom, is going to add anything to the glory of what God has done in the cross of Christ. But you have an impression yourself.

JSG What you say helps. He is addressing those who walked in the light of the assembly of God, and he is speaking therefore, is he not, of the conduct that is to mark such, and how they are to be governed by this gospel truth?

DCB Yes, that is right. So I suppose they were introducing human wisdom into the assembly, were they not? They were introducing

something that would aggrandise themselves, or various party leaders, and so on, and he had to say, 'This is finished, and it is not only finished but it is finished according to the severity that is suggested in the cross'.

JSG In some of the later verses he suggests that there is something that is better, which seems to me to help us. What is of God is better. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (v 25); so there is an advantage in this.

DCB Yes, it is helpful to see that. You see God's wisdom in allowing the cross. It brings in what is superior. It opens up what is superior in Christ coming before us, One who has reached us in our affections.

DJH So Paul speaks much in chapter 2 about the wisdom of this world, "God's wisdom in a mystery, that hidden wisdom ... which none of the princes of this age knew, (for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory)" v 7, 8. It seems as though this matter of crucifixion is completely foreign to the human mind.

DCB Yes. I think that is important, that the human mind really has come to an end. We remember that where He was crucified was at Golgotha, place of a skull. That is the human mind in all the best that it can bring in. It is not going to add anything; it is not going to do anything to come into what belongs to God. We are dependent, therefore, and we can be thankful for the divine wisdom that comes in.

DJH So they had no appreciation at all, did they, of the wisdom of God that was there in Jesus? They crucified Him. It is a terrible contrast really.

DCB Yes, it was confirming to be reading in Luke 23 in our local reading on Wednesday night, and we were affected by that. There was the crowd shouting, "Crucify, crucify him", v 21. They did not simply say, "Away with this man" (Luke 23: 18), as they did otherwise, or that He should be killed, but to crucify Him. There were the priests, who should really have been the best there was of mankind then. You would have expected that in the Jew who had had all these centuries of help from God, who claimed Abraham as their father, and so on. Yet their attitude is, "Crucify, crucify him". And the princes of the world, Herod and Pilate and others there, they were not appreciating such a Man; they would do away with Him. But God had in His mind and wisdom to show that in fact it is the world that has been crucified, is it not?

RHB Does that come out in the Lord speaking about His being lifted

up, “and I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me” (John 12: 32), that what seemed to be outwardly the end in defeat has been the basis of everything for God? Is that what you had in mind?

DCB That is very fine and very helpful, that we should be drawn in affection, “draw all to me”. It is drawing all the work of God, is it not, that really is in mind there? He is drawing all in affection towards Him as the One who has gone that way, and has gone that way for us, so that we are dependent on a Man who has gone that way for us.

JRW Could you say something in that connection about what is said in verse 25, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men”? The cross seems to demonstrate that, does it?

DCB Yes, there is a way in which really God is deriding the best that there is in man. So that He says, 'I will demonstrate My love, I will demonstrate My heart towards you in a place of utter weakness, at the cross'. And that will defeat the whole gathering together of men, it will defeat “Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified”, Rev 11: 8. But say more of your own impression.

JRW I am very interested in what you have brought before us, and just seeking to draw out what is in your mind. I was interested in your reference in chapter 2, to knowing “Jesus Christ, and *him* crucified”. My mind went to the first record of Paul's preaching which is, “he preached Jesus that *he* is the Son of God”, Acts 9: 20. I wondered whether that impression really never left him. It was *Him*; it was that Person that was crucified, and that seems to be the key, do you think, to what you are bringing before us?

DCB Yes. We do have to bear that in mind to run through all we are saying, because we can occupy ourselves with the cross almost to the exclusion of Christ if we take it in a purely doctrinal view. But here is a Man who is to affect our hearts. We are presenting a Man in perfection and in glory, a Man who has been for the pleasure of God, but then He has been the way of the cross, “*him*”. The world's view of Him, and our view of Him according to the old man, is, 'Away with Him'. But He is to reach our hearts in affection as the crucified One.

TJH Through weakness and defeat
He won the meed and crown (Hymn 24)

To win something must mean that the opponent is defeated, must it

not? It would fit in with what you are saying.

DCB Yes, well you can see that. Of course Satan thought, and the rulers of the world thought, at the cross, that they had the mastery. They thought "Away with this man" (Luke 23: 18); - 'we have finished with this Man; He is not going to trouble us any more; we have got rid of this Prophet or supposed Prophet'. That is the world's and Satan's view, and really we see how Satan was bruised, Satan was defeated there, and the whole range of the power of what was against God was defeated there at the cross, yet in a Man as crucified in weakness. Raised by God's power, of course, that is all part of the whole transaction, but it is by that way of going in weakness.

RDP-r Do we need to see the essential necessity of the cross in order for God to secure His purpose?

DCB Yes, "given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain", Acts 2: 23.

RDP-r Yes, I was thinking of what had come into God's universe. The cross is the answer to that in order that God might secure His end, which is man for Himself.

DCB Yes, how wonderful it is that God has come in, and you can see how it does away with the whole range of human wisdom. Human wisdom would never have envisaged such a way, but God has envisaged such a way. Through what was foolish to men, through what was weak to men, He is securing all that is for His own glory and pleasure eternally.

RDP-r So nothing would stand in God's way in securing His end, even the cross.

DCB Yes.

AM Not only has God overcome everything that might have stood in the way, but He has expressed Himself at the cross, has He not, so that we should know Him? We see divine power, it is God's power, as it says here, but we also learn all that God is. We see that God's heart is expressed there, is it not? What He is is expressed at the cross.

DCB Yes, that is right. So that if there is anything that is for God it has its origin in the cross. What there is in active response to the heart of God has been secured at the cross and from the cross.

RHB The angel identifies Him as “Jesus the crucified one”, “I know that ye seek Jesus the crucified one” (Matt 28: 5), and the personal name is given. I was thinking of what you were saying as to the need for our affections to be touched by that. It is almost a designation of the Lord, is it not, “the crucified one”?

DCB Yes, and I suppose you can understand what a reproach it was for someone to be seeking a “crucified one”. That is not how they would execute a noble. It was for the lowest persons; they reserved the cross for those who were low. The Lord Jesus has gone that way. Think of the reproach that would have been for such a man as Joseph of Arimathæa. He would go and seek for the body of One who had been crucified. Here He is, and God, in speaking through the angel you referred to, designating and glorifying the whole thought of the One who was “the crucified one”.

TJH That would be the condition which Nicodemus identified himself with - the Lord Jesus as crucified. He did not seem to be identified with Him before, but he seemed to be identified with Him in His death, do you think?

DCB Yes, there was that work of God with him, was there not? The work of God, “It is needful that ye should be born anew” (John 3: 7), but there was not a breaking through to an identification with Christ until his heart was affected by Him as crucified. There was something secured there, was there not? Our hearts are to be moved. Therefore that would be what would dissociate Joseph from the council, and that would be what would dissociate Nicodemus from the Pharisees that he belonged to, and that would dissociate each one of us from what is natural to us. The cross is therefore to have what we would call a moral effect. It is an actual change in our condition, is it not?

PM Is there the side of the curse related to the cross?

DCB Yes, say more about that.

PM Well, I was just thinking of what our brother said, that at that very point where man was exposed for what he was, Christ vicariously becoming the curse, God's heart was made known.

DCB Yes, “Christ has redeemed us out of the curse of the law”, Gal 3: 13. Think of the whole opening up of what there is as a redeemed people, because He has gone that way and taken on something so severe as the curse. “Cursed is every one hanged upon a tree”; I think

that is Paul's only reference to the tree, but there is something distinct about the tree as well, that that curse attaches to it.

PM I wondered if it was necessary that He should go out of this world by way of the cross, going out that way vicariously, in view of man being exposed and God made known. What Paul goes on to in chapter 2 is the things that the Spirit of God makes known, which that order of man that had to be removed could never know; but God was making known a new order of life and relationship. Would that be right?

DCB That would be right. There was something brought in in newness. "Newness of life" comes in and that is an effect of the cross, is it not? There is something that is going forward that is according to the divine heart and mind because what there was that was contrary has been dealt with.

AJMcS Just in line with what our brother said as to Nicodemus, in Romans 6, our old man has been crucified *with him* (v 6), and we are therefore buried *with him*, v 4. Really it is the effect of the affections going out to Christ in what He has suffered that helps us to accept that in our own moral being, do you think?

DCB Yes. Is there something of our minds coming into this, the appreciation and the acceptance of that fact. Because in one sense it has been done but then if we are going to come into liberty, which is what Romans 6 has in mind, we have to know that what we are, what would naturally be under the dominion of sin, has been dealt with and finished. The old man has been crucified and, as you emphasise, has been crucified *with Him*.

EOPM The scripture in verse 18 would make sense in English if it said, 'the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us that are saved it is God's power'. Do you think the thought you bring before us, 'the *word* of the cross' means that we get beyond what is historical and come in our minds to think through what it actually means? It has often impressed me, this expression that you are helpfully bringing before us, 'the *word* of the cross'. Many believers seem to stop at the cross as an object in itself. That in one sense is an historic event, but the *word* of the cross means that what it means has entered into my mind and heart and soul.

DCB That is right. I suppose that is essentially what we would desire from a time like this. We are thankful for every one who has an

appreciation of the cross of Christ, but then it is to have an effect so that our way of life changes, our behaviour changes. So that there is a word, the 'logos', there is a setting forth of the cross in a teaching that is going to meet Corinthian conditions, that is going to meet Galatian conditions, and you could say almost more basically is going to meet my condition, and your condition, as it is presented in Romans 6.

EOPM So it is important to see it is the present tense, to us that are saved *it is* God's power, not *it was*. We know that in one sense what happened at the cross was a great demonstration of power by which we have been secured through grace and mercy to come into the great things of God, but the word of the cross *is* God's power to us.

DCB Yes, so that it is not to be left behind, and you see why Paul brings it into almost all of his epistles. He would bring it in to touch of affections. A touch too of the severity of it should be kept before our souls.

DJH So when it says, "to us that are saved", that is very wide that word "saved". It is not simply initially having our sins forgiven, but saved; that would be saved from that old man that has been crucified, would it?

DCB Yes, that is right. There is an opening out of persons yielding their members instruments of righteousness, Rom 6: 19. That would be part of what it is to be saved, would it not? And there is what is working according to Him. It is not referred to, but Romans 8 so strongly would imply the cross. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, having sent his own Son, in likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled", v 3, 4. There is a very strong implication there of the cross, what has been condemned there, so that there should be those "who do not walk according to flesh but according to Spirit".

EOPM Would you see any link with this thought of "the word of the cross" and the Supper?

DCB Well, is not the whole of this beginning of Corinthians leading up to what there is at the Supper as we have opened up in 1 Corinthians 11 especially? There is something that has been awakened, something that has been given as a grounding, so that we can have our part then, and take our part together at the Supper. But you have something.

EOPM Just following up what is being said, that as our minds at the Supper are directed to the loaf and the cup, they must necessarily bring to mind the time when that body was given, and when that blood was shed, which was at the cross. But “the word of the cross” seems to me to perhaps include the fulness of what that remembrance each week would bring into our hearts, what has come in for God through that wonderful sacrifice.

DCB Yes, that is interesting. This wonderful consummation of the affection of God as seen in Christ was at the cross, and while in a certain sense we are not remembering a dead Christ, the affection has been shown there at the cross, and it is there that that precious blood was shed. So it must be in our hearts and affections as we are gathered, must it not?

TJH Is God's power, which is referred to, known and experienced in the occasion of the Supper? If you left out some of it you could say, “the word of the cross ... is God's power”. You could put it that way. Would that be experienced today in the occasion of the Lord's supper? I was thinking of Joseph and Nicodemus. We are not told, but no doubt they would have been there in the upper room. That is not the Supper of course, but God's power was certainly seen there, and is God's power not known among us at the occasion of the Lord's supper, the assembly occasion?

DCB Yes, that is right. So there is power. In a certain sense the power here is to meet challenges. I think the way in which it is presented here in Corinth is to meet challenges that were coming in, in persons setting themselves up, and persons taking a worldly position, and all this, but the power is going to go through so that there is an opening up of what there is in the Supper as persons are gathered together, having an experience in their souls of the power that has its effect on them proving themselves.

DJW Would the effect of keeping it up to date in ourselves be that I do not demonstrate the features of the flesh that came under judgement at the cross, but rather the features of the One who suffered vicariously there, do you think?

DCB Yes, so again that is really the way in which matters work out in Romans 6, is it not, that we should no longer serve sin. Sin has had dominion over the soul. It has almost had a rightful dominion over our soul. Perhaps that goes too far, but certainly the natural position of the

sinner is that sin has its dominion, and here there is a right not to serve it any longer. There is the right to “yield your members instruments of righteousness”, v 13. There is the right to act in a way that is according to the divine mind.

PJW The cross really is the dividing line, is it? I was thinking that man as such utterly rejected God and His Man, and God has utterly rejected man after the flesh. Would that be right?

DCB Yes, we sing that,

'... Thy death we deem
Our point of severance from this scene'. (Hymn 192)

That of course is the death of the cross. There is a point of severance, there is something that divides. One other feature which comes in, and perhaps it goes before what we have been thinking about as to the Supper, in the other Christian ordinance of baptism, where we are aware that there is a difference to us as baptised, and “We have been buried therefore with him by baptism unto death, in order that, even as Christ has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life”, Rom 6: 4. The actuality and the whole principle of baptism has its application to us. There is that difference that would allow us to walk forward in newness of life so that we can have our part properly in Christian life and behaviour.

JW In considering the cross, and “the word of the cross”, does it bring home to us the intensity of the Lord's sufferings and His humiliation? I wondered if the consideration of that is calculated to win our hearts for Him.

DCB Yes, I think that is to be kept in our hearts and minds as we consider these passages. It is our affections that are to be changed. He has been to the place of the most intense suffering, and He has been there vicariously, simply He has been *for us*, and our hearts are attracted to Him as the One who has been in that place. And you can see how it would condemn what we are naturally that has rejected Him, and would give us to live in newness of life as having a new origin in the cross. But say more.

JW What you say is right. It is really the place that Christ has in my affections that is the impetus in me not to allow the old man, the first man, is it not? But Christ really supersedes everyone else, everything

else.

DCB Yes, to go back to that hymn,

By love constrained, Thy death we deem
Our point of severance from this scene.

The fulness, the outshining, of His love and grace that is seen at the cross would draw us away from what we were, draw us in that He should be increasingly magnified to our hearts.

AJMcS Do you think in the typical teaching we feed on the lamb roast with fire before the passage of the Red Sea, Exod 12: 8. In other words, we are affected by what He suffered vicariously, and as we feed on Him it builds up our moral constitution as prepared to accept the truth of baptism, do you think?

DCB Yes, it is important, is it not, to see that as well as the blood outside, there is the feasting inside. Many believers you could say are sheltered by the blood but not sufficiently feeding within. I think “the word of the cross” would bring that to us, to feast upon the Man who was of such infinite pleasure to God that He has taken His place there for us.

RMB As to some of the lessons that we can draw from the cross which have a practical bearing on us today, I wondered whether one of them is that, in thinking about the cross it changes our view of the world around us? I am thinking in particular of the reference to it at the end of Galatians as to boasting “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” and the world being “crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14).

DCB Yes, the cross is to make the difference in these various aspects, is it not? And one very important one is, it is the world that has crucified our Lord and Saviour. The world's view and attitude is the same as it was two thousand years ago, and the way in which Paul puts it is therefore important, “through whom the world is crucified to me”, that is one and an important side that you see. Well, I am not going to have to do with that world that has so rejected my Saviour, but then, along with that “I to the world”. That is, I am taking that place in a sense along with the Lord Jesus. The world rejected Him and it rejected me too; I am not seeking a place in it, I am not seeking a way in it, I am not seeking the pleasures that are in it. Say more.

RMB Yes, I was thinking that, because as we grow up in the world, on the surface it seems to have a lot of possibilities, does it not, and many

things in it that naturally we find appealing? But would “the word of the cross” lead us to think more deeply about this world in which we are living, and to think more deeply about what its moral character is, and therefore what place it must have for me, do you think?

DCB Yes, so there is a whole system that is set up that is contrary to God. I have to do my work, I have to do various duties in it, I have to meet righteousness, as we put it, but am I trying to build up the world's system in what I am doing? Well I should not; I should be regarding it as a condemned place that I would touch as lightly as possible.

EOPM I was helped by Mr Fred Trussler when I was quite young. In one of his preachings he said, 'If a believer goes back into the world he has to go by the cross, because that is where God condemned it'. It would be a very sobering thing, would it not, if I am minded to go into the world, as a believer I will have to go there via the cross? God would remind me what He thinks of the world on my way back to it, do you think?

DCB Yes. It is an interesting and sobering thought that really if you are in the world, if you have your part in the world, you really are in the crowd shouting, “Crucify him”. Well that is a very serious and sober thought. Of course we know our own nature and our propensities, which is why we have to have this “word of the cross” constantly brought before us; and why the cross needs to be brought before us week by week in the preaching. How important it is that believers should hear and listen to the preaching, and that the facts of the gospel should be brought before us.

JRW You have mentioned the word 'severity' several times in relation to the cross, and I wonder in view of what we are saying if you would open up a little more what is in your mind in relation to that.

DCB Well, that is the way that it is mentioned in scripture. The death of the cross is brought before us. It is not the death of a noble; the Romans would have executed their nobles with the sword, but here is something they intended to be an ignominious, and severe, and long drawn out punishment and death. And of course that means that if we are going to take it on, as Paul is when he says, “I am crucified” (Gal 2: 20), we have to appreciate the seriousness and the severity of it. If he is saying “the world is crucified to me” (Gal 6: 14), again it is according to that standard of severity. And if he is saying, “they that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh” - they have done it themselves - “with the

passions and the lusts” (Gal 5:24), he is treating them with that degree of seriousness. But say on.

JRW I am interested in the way in which you used that word in relation to it. I think we feel, or I feel, very shallow in relation to what our brother has brought in as to our view of the world, and the more we appreciate the severity of what happened at the cross, the severity of what the Lord Jesus went through, the severity of what was accomplished there in relation to God having rejected the old order of man completely, the more our view of the world will condemn it really, will it not?

DCB Yes, because we are able to be rather light with ourselves. We may appreciate there is what is wrong, and so on, but not deal with it. We speak about self-judgement, and I do not think it is a scriptural term, but we should realise that self-judgement is not really my judgement of myself, it is really coming to God's judgement of myself, which is what was seen at the cross of Christ.

RDP-r So it says that “by the cross of Jesus stood” certain ones, John 19: 25. Is that where we need to take our stand now?

DCB That is right, and that of course was a public place that they took in relation to the cross and the shame and all that would attach to it. It was only affection that could bring them there.

RDP-r I was thinking that. It is affection for the Person that is going to change us. It is not exactly just the cross, it is the Person that was there, why He was there. And affection for Him is going to influence us in our judgement of the world and how it treated Him, but there is a testimonial side to it as well, is there not, “by the cross of Jesus”?

DCB Yes, so there is that testimony; there are persons who can be seen as standing by the cross. Well that would be for me, I would say, a test - do persons know that is where I am standing?

RHB The passage our brother refers to indicates that persons standing there have new affinities together. The Lord drew attention to a new relationship, did He not? He saw the disciple whom He loved standing by, and His mother, and He said, “behold thy son ... Behold thy mother”, John 19: 26, 27. I was thinking that while the cross of Christ severs us from one order of association, it opens up a new one, does it not? The apostle speaks of “the enemies of the cross of Christ” in Philippians, but he goes on to speak about “*our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens”, Phil 3: 18, 20.

DCB Yes, well it is fine to see that. Our links together are as persons who have had that association together. How we can be thankful as we gather together in such a company as this. What are the links? What are the associations we have? Well, the very origin of them is that we have all come to the cross, we have appreciated the cross. But then the matters are going to be enjoyed more fully, and newness of life would be enjoyed really, as we would move forward together, as we are associated with those who appreciate what has been secured and done in the cross of Christ.

RWF The chapter from which we have read is the chapter that also gives one of the clearest statements in scripture as to the meaning of fellowship, "God is faithful, by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord", v 9. I was thinking in connection with what our brother has remarked, that it is almost as if the apostle goes to the root of matters in his references to the cross so that we might know what fellowship really is.

DCB Yes, and we see that. It is suggested too in the reference in Ephesians, which takes it to a height there, "making peace; and might reconcile both", Jew and Gentile, but it is not just Jew and Gentile, it is you and me, it is wherever there is a disparity, which is what there is naturally. "And might reconcile both in one body to God by the cross, having by it slain the enmity", Eph 2: 16. How wonderful that everything that might cause a difference and a distinction has been removed. There is the reference there that "*he* is our peace" (v 14), so that there is enjoyment of fellowship together.

RHB The severity that our brother was referring to is seen very powerfully in Psalm 22, is it not, the severity of what the cross meant for the Lord? We have been speaking of it but the psalm shows His own feelings. We were looking at it last Lord's day locally and were reminded that there are verses in that psalm that literally portray the agony of crucifixion. It is affecting to read that psalm in the light of that, the literal severity of it for Christ; and if that does not touch our affections you wonder what will.

DCB Yes. He has been there, He has gone that way for us; and if we speak of severity, actually all the severity was borne by Him. However we might regard it as appropriate to judge the flesh, or the lusts or the passions of the world, the actual enduring was all His.

DJH That would go through to the six hours on the cross, would it? I

was just thinking of the severity. There is the public side, and then it refers to “the death of the cross”, that has in view the public side, does it not? But then while He was there there were sufferings unfathomed by us, but they all entered into the severity because it was there that God judged that man that put Him there.

DCB Yes, that is right. It is helpful to see that. You see man's view and what man would do at the cross, and it is important that we actually do see that, what brings us into blessing and liberty is that He has dealt with matters before God at the cross.

RWF In connection with what was demonstrated at the cross, perhaps we might say what was established, could you tell us a little of God's power, how much that thought embraces?

DCB Well, it is interesting that God's power and God's wisdom are Christ crucified; of course it is the Person, but the Person crucified was the power. Really there is a whole universe for God, is there not, that is established and strengthened on the basis of that work? All that could be contrary to God's way and will has been overthrown, and here everything goes forward in triumph. He has led captivity captive, has he not? But you have your own impression.

RWF Well I would like my impressions to be enlarged. It says, “to us that are saved it is God's power”. Now one can take what I might speak of as a personal view of that. Sometimes we feel in ourselves a lack of power, and the reason for that might be that we have not accepted the truth and the bearing and reality of the word of the cross, but it seems to suggest, the way the apostle words it, very much more than that: a whole scene established for God's pleasure. We might have thought that power relates more to resurrection, but here he associates it with the cross.

DCB Yes, I was wondering about that. We had a word on Tuesday which really more related to the power of resurrection; clearly the power of defeating death.

JSG There is a further reference to God's power in verse 24, “to those that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ God's power and God's wisdom”. I would like further help as to the working of that out. What are the signs of power from God? How do we judge and discern it?

DCB Well, there is a power within that the believer has to move

forward, because there is a power to deal with what is according to this world and its ways. It would come out in our flesh, and what is natural to us, but then there is power to secure that universe for God on the basis of what was endured here at the cross. Say on.

JSG Would verse 30 help as to it, “of him are ye in Christ Jesus”? Everything has its source in that One if it is to be for the pleasure of God, and especially in the house of God, do you think?

DCB Yes, and I suppose we have to see that His position there at the right hand of God is as “having made by himself the purification for sins”, Heb 1: 3. If the power comes from Him in resurrection and in glory and ascension, and even the power of the Spirit has to be active in showing it, it all depends on His having gone this way of the cross.

JSG It seems that Paul's way of presenting the gospel from the first paragraph of chapter 2 had this as one of its principal objectives, that what was accomplished should stand in God's power, do you think?

DCB Yes, so he is a person who is educated, trained at the feet of Gamaliel, and all there was that would have come in in natural wisdom, natural power at its best, and it is finished, it is done. And he is coming before a cultured company in Corinth, what there would be of Jew and Greek in Corinth, and he is not going to build up either of these, Jew or Greek. He is going to build up what is according to “Jesus Christ, and *him* crucified”.

PM Is it a help in our soul exercises, not only when we are younger but as we go on as well, to see that there are certain things that God in His power has already finished with, and *that* power becomes available to me as in exercise I seek to align myself with what God has done?

DCB Yes, so that the old man *has been* crucified with Him. That is a finished matter, but then Paul comes into *I* am crucified. He aligns himself there really with what God has done and finished in severity in disposing of the old man.

RJF In relation to this question of God's power, the veil of the temple was rent while the Lord was still on the cross.

DCB Say more.

RJF I think a brother referred earlier on to the removal of man; Matthew 27 also refers to it (v 51), signifying that God had come out. We can see in that God coming out in power, and not only the possibility

but the actuality.

DCB Yes, it is interesting to see that; God can come out. He has a right and a basis in righteousness to come out and to act in power. Even that initial, literal, rather mysterious, reference that “many bodies of the saints fallen asleep arose” comes in there, that God has acted in the cross. The Lord Jesus had not yet risen, but there was power that would affect persons in their tombs.

AJMcS I just wanted to ask you, would you say whether “the word of the cross” has any bearing on open air preaching?

DCB Well that is a test. Certainly as there is open air preaching, there is something of the standing by the cross, is there not? However I have not done that for some years now; so perhaps I had better not say too much more about it. There certainly is something of a right testimony that has to go out, and perhaps we should all be exercised about it.

BES I was just wondering where it would fit in that the Lord said that we are to take up our cross and follow Him, Luke 9: 23.

DCB Yes, well it is interesting, is it not, that there was a person who was brought in to carry the Lord's cross, Simon, Luke 23: 26? His cross was unique. What a glory and a privilege that was that someone should take His cross. But then I suppose, as Paul speaks of it, “I am crucified”, he must have appreciated that he had a cross himself. Say more.

BES It is something active, is it not? It is something we are to take up, not just to let it happen, so to speak, and it involves accepting the condemnation. “The death of the cross” is not just death and suffering, it is condemnation, is it not?

DCB Yes. So “they that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts” (Gal 5: 24), but in a certain sense that is a continuing matter, is it not? But there is what has been done; so we would take that place; and of course it would mean taking up a place of reproach, would it not? There is reproach, and our reproach should be associated with us. There was “the scandal of the cross” in relation to Christ's cross. There must be a scandal related to any cross as far as this world is concerned. The believer's position is something that reproaches the world to the degree that we are faithful.

DJH So that makes what our brother refers to very personal, does it not? But I have to see that there is that in me to which the cross applies in that way. So really taking up the cross, would it be right to say, is something like you referred to as to self-judgement; that is, that it is what I find in myself that the cross applies to?

DCB Yes, we need to be continued in it. It is daily, is it not, taking up the cross? There is something that is done, something finished blessedly at the cross at Golgotha, but there is something that is to be continued in exercise to be faithful to God, to be faithful during the time of the Lord's absence.

RWF Is it to help us in connection with the gospel to reflect that Christ, in accepting the crucifixion that was His lot according to men's judgement, took the criminal's place? It was not the death of a noble, as someone has remarked earlier, but He went to the lowest point. I wondered if that helps us in evangelical activity because He has gone to the lowest point in order that the lowest in society might be reached, the whole of society but including the lowest.

DCB Yes, which brings in the glory of that initial work that there was. One of the malefactors by Him was convicted that he was rightly being crucified, affected by the grace of God as seen in the Lord Jesus by him on the cross, Luke 23: 41.

RWF Paul was prepared to accept that he was "the offscouring of the world", 1 Cor 4: 13. So "the word of the cross" had been accepted by him and was expressed in him.

DCB Yes.

JSG I was thinking as to what has just been said that Paul was following in the steps of the one who became "obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross", Phil 2: 8. It is presented there, is it not, as if this was man's worst, which was accepted in the obedience of the perfect Man according to the will of God?

DCB Yes, so we see man's worst in the scandalous character of it, in the reproach, in the weakness. All these things that man would do to inflict upon Christ, and He would accept it, He would go that way that we should be brought into the fulness of blessing.

RMB It says, "If any one will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily". So it is not "the cross of Christ" exactly, it is *his*

cross, it is personal to that individual. Would that suggest that there may be things that an individual might be specially called on to bear in a particular circumstance?

DCB Yes, I think you would see that; that it is individual. Even while we are all of the one nature according to what we are in the flesh, yet there are different propensities in it so that what attracts one may not attract another. So it needs to be looked at, that it is particular and individual to deal with my own tendencies, and to be very careful therefore in how you would look at your brother. He has his own cross. Not that we would not be together and helping one another, and realising, as we have said, that there is the same nature, but still it is very much to be taken to myself. I think there is something for our continued consideration.

East Finchley

9th August 2008

Key to Initials

D C Brown, Edinburgh; R H Brown, East Finchley;
R M Brown, East Finchley; R J Flowerdew, Sunbury;
R W Flowerdew, Sunbury; J S Gray, East Finchley;
T J Harvey, East Finchley; D J Hutson, London;
A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; P Martin, Colchester;
A J McSeveney, Twickenham; E O P Mutton, Walton-on-the-Naze;
R D Painter, Yeovil; B E Surtees, Colchester;
J R Walkinshaw, Maidstone; P J Walkinshaw, Gillingham;
D J Wright, Havering; J Wright, Havering.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST IN THE PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES

Brian E Surtees

Acts 3: 17-24; 10: 42-43; 26: 22-23

There are a number of other scriptures in mind to refer to, but these will suffice to begin with. The brethren will perhaps pardon me for having written down a list of the other passages, because they are rather many to remember; but I think these three or four references to the prophets warrant us in inquiring, in detail, what it is that Peter and Paul here tell us is to be found in those prophets. Acts 3:18 says that "God ... had announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer". There is the reference to "the restoring of all things, of which God has spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets since time began" in verse 21. Then it says in verse 24, "All the prophets from Samuel and those in succession after him, as many as have spoken, have announced also these days". In chapter 10 verse 43 we have, "To him all the prophets bear witness". Paul, in the verses we have read in chapter 26, confirms that.

So this leaves something for the saints to search out in *all the prophets*: particularly the sufferings of Christ, and then "these days", the days of the Messiah, and then, as Peter brings out in chapter 10 in the verses we read there, "remission of sins" - it says that all the prophets bear witness to Christ in relation to that. Paul again confirms that in Romans where he says that the righteousness of God now made known is "borne witness to by the law and the prophets", Rom 3: 21. Well, all that of course, is far too vast a subject to take up at once, and it needs a great deal of searching; but I should like to draw attention to certain things in the prophets, relating to the statement in the first of the passages that we have read: "God has thus fulfilled what he had announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer."

Now we are familiar, I am sure, with many passages in the prophetic scriptures that relate to Christ as suffering, but I must confess that I have not yet been able to find it in *all* of them. Having done a little searching - and I would encourage us all to do it - I have found references in many, with the help of the written ministry that we have, but there are still some in which it would take more searching to find it. But I believe the Lord would encourage us to do that, to find out the

depth of the riches that are in the Scriptures. As the Lord Himself said, “Ye search the scriptures, for ye think that in them ye have life eternal, and they it is which bear witness concerning me”, John 5: 39. We are expected to find that in all the Scriptures, something about Christ in every passage, I believe, or something that brings us to think of Him, to think of what He has effected, and to see how He is related to everything that is brought out in every passage of the Scripture. But this verse in Acts is more specific than that: it tells us that *all the prophets* have announced beforehand, or God has announced by them, *that His Christ should suffer*.

We might begin with some direct references to that. There are prophetic scriptures, such as Psalm 22, which directly refer to the sufferings of Christ in so many words. Isaiah 53 is another well-known one. Think of what it says there: “Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been revealed?” It goes on to speak of Him bearing our griefs, carrying our sorrows, being regarded as “stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed”. These words are familiar; how thankful we are that they are familiar to us! We can never be too familiar with them, we can thankfully go over them again and again, and find in them that not only was it the divine mind beforehand that Christ should suffer, it was in the *word* of God too, so as to prepare those who would believe on Him to receive the truth of it, and to give them assurance, as looking back, that all was provided for in the divine mind and in the prophetic word - “since time began”, Peter says.

Then we have a reference in Jeremiah, which Matthew brings forward in his gospel. There was an attack aimed at Christ by Herod, and he destroyed all the boys in Bethlehem from two years and under. The Lord was preserved, in the ways of God, through being taken with Joseph and Mary to Egypt, but the grief of it! The Lord, we might say, reverently, was not spared the grief of it; although He was not put to death by Herod at that time, He, and the many mothers in Israel, felt the grief of it. So Jeremiah speaks of “Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are not”, Jer 31: 15; Matt 2: 17-18. And the Lord entered into those feelings. I am not speaking of what He may have felt as a babe, that is not recorded for us; but we know that the Lord, in His sympathy with the feelings of all those who suffered in a godly way, must in due time have entered in spirit into

that, as into many other things. So we can regard that as a direct prediction of the sufferings of Christ.

Then we get, in the book of Daniel, that the Messiah was to be cut off, and have nothing, Dan 9: 26. That again is a well-known scripture, but have we thought of the significance of it? After all those seventy years of captivity that Daniel and others had gone through, and then after the even longer time that was prophesied - almost the whole of the seventy weeks or 490 years - even then, instead of things coming immediately to a glorious conclusion, the Messiah was to be cut off, and have nothing, and there was to be desolation and destruction and war to the end. That includes the sufferings of Israel, but Christ entered into those. There is also a gap of undetermined length in that prophecy, as we know, in which God's great thoughts in relation to the assembly are now revealed; but that does not come into the Old Testament prophets - room is made for it but it is not brought out. So our thoughts, in considering a scripture like that, are to be concentrated on the sorrow of what it meant or was going to mean to the Messiah, what it was going to mean to the people of God, what it will even yet mean to the godly remnant of Israel who will have to go through many sufferings which the Lord has already gone through before them, before they reach the glorious conclusion that is indicated in verse 24 and spoken of elsewhere in the prophets.

Then we get a verse in Amos - I am mentioning only the outstanding references that have come to mind recently - where God speaks of turning their feasts into mourning and where they will mourn as for an only son (8: 10): that is surely prophetic of what Israel will come to as they realise what they have done in putting the Lord to death. But for us, who already have the light, that brings to mind what the Lord Himself *has* already suffered, and how those sufferings were in the prophets. Israel has yet to come to it, but we *have* come to it if we have been brought to repentance, that the cutting-off of Christ, the putting to death of Christ, was on account of our sins; we are to have *some* impression of what the judgment would have been against us, and what it was to the Lord to have that to face - though we are not capable of entering very much into either of those things.

We get the reference in that remarkable verse in Micah to smiting "the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek", Mic 5: 1. We get in Zechariah 13:7 that Jehovah was going to smite the shepherd, and the sheep would be scattered. These are all mentions, in an

unmistakable and direct way, in the prophets, of what Christ was going to suffer.

Besides these, there are scriptures in the prophets where the prophet himself was to be a sign. It is perhaps not so obvious at first sight that those things refer to the sufferings of Christ; but to those who are instructed, who have the light that the Spirit brings, and the light that we have in the New Testament, such chapters as Isaiah 8, where Isaiah speaks of being a sign - "Behold, I and the children that Jehovah hath given me are for signs and for wonders" - would refer, among other things, to the suffering path that the Lord went through. Another chapter in Isaiah, chapter 20, is on that line too. Isaiah had to suffer reproach, great reproach, as a sign and a warning to Israel, and in that he is a type of Christ.

Ezekiel had instruction in chapter 4 to lie on his left side for three hundred and ninety days, and then on his right side for forty days, again as a sign to the people. That is a reference to the sufferings of Christ as entering in spirit into the state and experience of the people under God's government. Ezekiel was to portray it, he was to be a living parable, so to speak, of what God had against the people, and how it was to be borne. It could only be fulfilled in Christ. Ezekiel no doubt did suffer, but his suffering literally was not on a level with the suffering of Christ; none of the sufferings of the prophets were, but they were used as signs by God Himself, to instruct the people, to cause them to *consider their ways* as another prophet puts it (Hag 1: 5, 7), to weigh up before God what it was they were doing, what it was they were involved in, what it was that they were guilty of, that needed God to act in judgment in such a way.

We have Hosea: we know about the experiences of Hosea in chapters 1 to 3, how he had to go through experiences that reflected the unfaithfulness of God's people, how he had to feel with God in relation to it, and that is another aspect of the sufferings of Christ. Hosea again was a sign. They were to take account of him, and his wife, and all that he did under instructions from God; they were to take account of it as instructing them in God's faithfulness in spite of their unfaithfulness.

We have Jonah. The Lord speaks of his three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish as a sign that the Son of man was to be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, Matt 12: 39-40. The application of that is only too evident. So besides direct predictions, we have the occasions where the prophet himself passes

through certain things as a sign to others. It is all part of the sufferings of Christ made known in the prophets.

Another form of suffering which comes out in the prophets is that their word was rejected. We get that in Isaiah chapter 7, where Ahaz the king is not prepared to receive the word that Isaiah brings. The prophet no doubt felt that on God's behalf, and none felt it like Christ. We get it more clearly perhaps, in Jeremiah, how his word was rejected - in chapters 20 and 26, for example. There was opposition from false prophets, and there were accusations from false prophets. In chapter 36, he had a roll written when he was in the prison, and the king burnt it. In chapter 42 he had instructions given to him by God, and the leaders came to ask him for the word of God, and when he told it to them they refused it. The rejection of his word was something that the prophet rightly felt on God's behalf. We get that fulfilled in the Lord's own ministry in an outstanding way. "He came to his own, and his own received him not" (John 1: 11), and we get constant opposition to the word that He brought, the ministry that He brought; only a few, in whom God worked, received it, and the Lord felt that. He says, according to the words of another prophet, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought", Isa 49: 4. That was a kind of suffering which the prophets of the Old Testament had known, but which none knew to the extent that the Lord knew it.

Then we have another kind of suffering which came out in the Lord supremely, that He felt with God about the state of the people. That too comes out prophetically in the Old Testament. We can think of Moses on the mountain, and coming down to find that they had made the golden calf: think how he felt with God about that, Exod 32: 19-20. But think how much more so the Lord felt when He observed - when He not only knew in divine knowledge but came down and *observed*, so to speak, and experienced as being among men - the distance and darkness in which men were, the distance from God, the estrangement from God, the opposition to God, and that especially among God's chosen people! The Lord felt that, and the prophets before Him had felt it, the Spirit of God had brought it out, and makes it available to us in the record of the Scriptures to contemplate.

The suffering is more acute when combined with personal enmity or treachery against Christ, as in Psalm 55: 12-14, where David says: "For it is not an enemy that hath reproached me - then could I have borne it; neither is it he that hateth me that hath magnified himself

against me - then would I have hidden myself from him; but it was thou, a man mine equal, mine intimate, my familiar friend. . . . We who held sweet intercourse together. To the house of God we walked amid the throng." David felt what it was to have opposition against him and betrayal from those who were close to him. He was prophetic of the Lord in that. A scripture very like it (Psalm 41: 9) is brought forward in John 13: 18, in relation to Judas. We find something similar also in Psalm 69. It says there, "The zeal of thy house hath devoured me", and the disciples remembered that when the Lord cast out the money-changers and sellers of doves and so on from the temple (John 2: 17). The Lord felt how God's house was being made a house of merchandise instead of a house of prayer for all the nations: the zeal of God's house devoured Him, so to speak. That is quoted from verse 9 of the Psalm, but the very same verse goes on to say, "and the reproaches of them that reproach thee have fallen upon me". The significance of that was not brought out until later, when Paul brings it out in Romans 15: 3. Certain things the disciples could observe, could take account of during the Lord's lifetime; "The zeal of thy house hath devoured me" was one of them, but "The reproaches of them that reproach thee have fallen upon me" could really only be understood after the Spirit came, and so we do not find that brought out until Paul's ministry.

But all these things are there in the Old Testament, to be brought out. Some of them may be hidden; the disciples needed the Lord's instruction and they needed the Spirit's help to understand these things, and so do we; they are not exactly on the surface, most of them, but they are there in the word of God and are suitable subjects for searching out. As Solomon says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the glory of kings is to search out a thing" (Proverbs 25: 2). We have that opportunity in the Scriptures.

So feeling with God about the state of things, especially among God's people, is part of the sufferings of Christ brought out in these passages we have just alluded to. The book of Lamentations is another outstanding example of the same thing - how deeply Jeremiah felt about the city and how it had been destroyed - but that led him to feel too the state of things in it that had made the judgment necessary in God's ways. He felt it deeply. He felt it in his book of prophecy too. We could find many places in those books where he speaks of weeping, and his eyes running down with streams of water for the ruin of the daughter of his people (Jer 9: 1, 13: 17; Lam 2: 11, 3: 48; compare Ps

119: 136). Those were the feelings brought about in him by the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ which was in the prophets pointed out these things (1 Pet 1: 10-11), and the searching of their writings will bring to light many of the features of the Spirit of Christ for our instruction.

Then in Ezekiel chapters 8 to 11, we see Ezekiel brought in spirit to Jerusalem, to see what was going on there, and how God was obliged to execute judgment. He felt with God about it, he was sharing divine feelings about the state of things.

We get in the book of Hosea again, chapter 11, God's feelings about Ephraim. How should He give Ephraim over, or deliver up Israel? How could He? God had to pass them through severe discipline, but He felt it; I believe it would be right to say He felt it more than they did. The prophet enters into those feelings of God. He is again representative of Christ in doing so. Christ, not only as a divine Person but as in manhood being a Servant of God, enters into the feelings of God about the state of things amongst His people, and about how much it costs divine Persons to have to exercise judgment or discipline upon them. Divine feelings in their depth are involved in that.

We have referred to the verse in the Psalm, "The zeal of thy house hath devoured me", and there may be a suggestion of the same thing in the book of Haggai, where he speaks about the fact that the people paid so much attention to their own houses that they neglected God's house, Hag 1: 3-6. God felt that; God felt it not only because of what He was missing, to speak reverently, but because of what the people were missing. It comes out again in Malachi 3: 10-12. God was only too ready to bless them, desirous of blessing them, but in order to make that blessing available He has to urge them to "bring the whole tithe into the treasure-house", and then He says, "Prove me . . . if I open not to you the windows of the heavens, and pour you out a blessing, till there be no place for it". God is ready to do that, and if there are things that hinder it, in the state of the people as it was then or in our state now today, God feels that. God desires to give blessing and spiritual prosperity, and He feels anything that will be a hindrance to it. He desires that we too should feel it, and so He appeals to us through the prophetic word, as He did to His people of old.

We get in Zechariah 2: 8, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye", recalling similar expressions in Deuteronomy 32: 9-10 and Lamentations 2: 18. This speaks of God's feelings about the

way His people are treated by the enemy - or might be treated - and the prophet enters into those feelings of God, expresses the Spirit of Christ in doing so. That relates to Israel there, but it would apply also to believers today. It is on the same line as what the Lord says to Saul in Acts 9, "*I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest*". Saul was persecuting the saints, he was touching the Lord Himself: to use the language of Zechariah, he was touching the apple of God's eye - a very sensitive point. Divine Persons felt it, and Saul himself was brought to feel it too. He had to pass through much discipline, but he accepted it as from God; and he arrived at not only the greatest appreciation of Christ's assembly that any apostle or any other believer ever had, but the greatest service too in relation to it in his ministry.

We might inquire, Where can we find the sufferings of Christ in some of these other prophets? That is something that will need further searching out, I believe; but there may be a suggestion of something on the same line as we have just mentioned - God feeling it when His people are ill-treated - in the book of Obadiah. As we know, Obadiah is occupied with the judgment upon Edom, and one of the things that he brings forward is that Edom was totally unsympathetic with Jerusalem when Jerusalem was under attack from another enemy, verses 11-14. In fact, Edom actually rejoiced over the downfall of Jerusalem, and however guilty Jerusalem was, God is not pleased with that. God feels it, and no doubt the prophet felt it too. God did not use unfeeling men as instruments to speak His word, or to write it, He used those who were in accord with Him in spirit. So that when God speaks of that through Obadiah, I believe we can trace the Spirit of Christ in Obadiah in it, that he was sharing God's feelings about the way God's people were treated.

So whether it is Israel, or whether it is the assembly, or whether it is the patriarchs, God feels the way in which His people are treated, and it is the Spirit of Christ that would cause us to feel it. "Touch not mine anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm", He said, in relation to those going back to Abraham's time, 1 Chron 16: 15-22. The Spirit of Christ is not limited in time either to the present or the past or the future, it is the same Spirit of Christ all the way through, and will be, as we know from instruction we have had in the ministry that has come to us, in the godly remnant that will be there after the church has gone.

Opposition from God's own people may go further than the rejection of the word, which we have already considered. We see this form of suffering outstandingly in Jeremiah: how persistently he was

opposed by the Jews of Jerusalem, the false prophets and those that they influenced, and at times by the king himself. He had to minister in spite of that, he had to bear it all, he had to go on in spite of it; and it cost him a great deal, as we see in reading his book, and observing how words from his book are taken up in the New Testament.

We have not mentioned all the prophets, there are others that could be mentioned, and others again where it still, for me at least, would need further searching to find exactly where, in what chapters and verses, the truth that we have been considering is brought out. As was said before, I would encourage all the brethren to follow that up. We should keep in mind that the prophetic word is not limited to what is written in the books of the prophets. Peter, in the passage we first read, mentions "the prophets . . . as many as have **spoken**". No writings by Elisha and others have come down to us, and very little by Elijah (2 Chron 21: 12-15); but what is recorded *about* them is very instructive; and who knows what the Spirit may have brought out in their unrecorded oral ministry?

I should like to conclude with a further word about following things up. We are encouraged to do that. Paul commends Timothy for doing it, for fully following up what had been brought to him through Paul, 1 Tim 4: 6. Now we follow things up in various ways. Searching the Scriptures is one of them, but we need to go further than that: we need to follow up the truth not just in the terms of it but in prayerfulness about it, to see and receive its bearing upon us, because every feature of the truth has a bearing upon us in some way or another. Even if the prophetic scriptures, for example, are not *about* the saints of the assembly, yet they are spoken *to* them, they are communicated *to* them by the Spirit; and the assembly being the nearest, as we are often reminded, to the heart of Christ, is the family most able, most qualified - most *enabled*, should I say - to share His interests. It would be very selfish if we were to take the view that because the prophetic scriptures (or any other part of the Scripture) are not about the saints of the assembly, therefore they do not concern us. They do concern us, because everything that concerns Christ and His sufferings, and His glory, is of interest to those who are nearest to Him. So the assembly is the family that is most capable, most enabled by the privileges it has and the power of the Spirit, to enter in to the Lord's feelings and the Lord's thoughts about all the families. We should therefore follow things up in that way.

Then of course the truth has its *practical* effect. We are called

on, in the course of the testimony, to face various forms of suffering, to enter with the people of God into what they are passing through. We have not spoken of that because the time is short, but that also is a line of things that is brought out in the prophets. Think of how Jeremiah, for example, was forced to go with a rebellious group of those who had escaped the captivity of Babylon, forced to go with them into Egypt, although he knew it was against the word of God, it was against what he himself had communicated to them, but nevertheless he had to pass through it, chaps 42 and 43. In the same way Joshua and Caleb, though they were not themselves disobedient to the report that was brought back by them from the land, yet they had to go with the people in those years of wandering before they could enter into the land that they so desired to get into. Well, we may have to pass through things, in company with the people of God, that we know the Lord does not approve of, and yet He would have us suffer along with the people of God in what He brings upon them because of it. That will require suffering, and it will require endurance to go through it.

It will require endurance to go through in sharing the Lord's feelings about the state of things among His people, as we have referred to earlier. It will require devotion to Him to go on in perseverance with the word of God if others reject it, and it will require endurance to go through in faithfulness to Him if we are called on to suffer for the sake of righteousness. All these things are the ways in which the Spirit of Christ in suffering can be brought out in the saints now. We have to be prepared for what it will cost, so we need to follow these things up in reading and prayer, and in practical perseverance through the difficulties that we pass through in the ways of God, including, maybe, opposition from some of those who are part of the people of God. It will require that we should endure in sharing divine feelings about all that surrounds us, and endurance in every way to go through in faithfulness, to bring out these features of Christ that God is looking for among His saints at the present time.

Well, I am conscious of many shortcomings in the way this has been put, but I trust that the Lord may use it to awaken interest further in a more extensive and detailed way, to search in the Scriptures the riches of what there is to be found there in relation to Christ - His sufferings, His greatness, and His glories, 1 Pet 1: 11. May it be so, in His Name.

East Finchley
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