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LOVE NEVER FAILS

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1 Corinthians 13: 8; 2 Timothy 4: 11; Luke 24: 29-36

It is not difficult to gather from the setting of these scriptures that there is the suggestion of the day of small things, outwardly. Paul, at a very critical time, in the passage referred to in 2 Timothy 4, spoke of the whereabouts of certain persons not many and then he said "Luke alone is with me". One man, only one. "Take Mark, and bring him with thyself" two more not many; small numbers!

In Luke 24 the Lord is seen labouring, we might say, in a service of love. We are acquainted with the structure of this well-known chapter and the result of this labour of love to get two persons moving in the right direction; then you get the eleven mentioned later on, not many. Brokenness is suggested in the eleven, not twelve but eleven. We know what happened, causing depletion in the number. It is a day of small things but Paul assures us; and we are being helped and the Lord does help to prove in the way of experience that "love never fails". There should be no doubt in our minds, beloved brethren, when we just reflect on the constant service to us of the blessed Spirit in the flow of substantial, constructive ministry that is coming, that the dispensation is going to finish in glory. The question is whether or not we are concerned that the Lord is looking to us who are privileged to be in the area where the truth is cherished, and asserted in power, as to whether we will set ourselves to afford Him the wherewithal to finish the dispensation in glory. It would be derogatory to think that divine Persons would ask us to do something that is impossible. To each of the churches in Revelation, whatever the conditions were, dark as it was in Laodicea, the Lord speaks of an overcomer: "He that overcomes". The Lord Himself is speaking, beloved brethren; He supposes that there will be persons who overcome. His word "He that overcomes" is the assurance that He has in mind (I speak reverently) that there will be such persons. There is no doubt in His mind. The blessed

reality of His manhood is in it, for He speaks as a man what a wonderful Man He is! "He that overcomes", He says. In every church there will be overcomers. The Lord said "My food is that I should do the will of him that has sent me, and that I should finish his work", John 4: 34. We have to make up our minds that, come what may, the service of God and assembly life and conditions must be our first concern, even to the exclusion of food, if needs be. We are to be overcomers.

I referred to the passage in Luke to show how divine Persons skilfully make way for us to show whether or not, or to what extent, we are loving in response to divine love. "Love never fails", Paul says. We can see from his life how closely he followed his Master at every turn of the way. What variations there were in his life and in his service but he went on steadily, without flinching, in the course that his Master had dictated for him and had set out in His life personally. Paul could say at the end "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith", 2 Tim 4: 7. This is the man that tells us that "love never fails". It was seen in Christ personally. Do we see it? I would be bold enough to say for every one here, that we have seen, in Christ personally, that love never fails. He is looking for us to give an answer from our side in experience. That is the kind of material He is going to finish with in assembly conditions, however difficult, however dark, outwardly. Inwardly, He is going to finish with this mind His own skilful service as Priest, as Shepherd, as Saviour - what is He not to us? - and coupled with that, the service of the blessed Spirit, the One of whom Jesus could speak as "another Comforter". Formation in us should be the equivalent, insofar as it can be seen in creatures, of what is seen in Himself personally.

"Love never fails". Let us get down to it, beloved brethren. What a time we are in - the choicest of times! What an age it has been! and we are to have part in the continuance of what is so delightful to God. So the Lord said, to quote Him again, "My food is that I should do the will of him that has sent me, and that I should finish his work".

Paul must have been very much comforted with a man like Luke just beside him and with him at one of the most crucial times in his history, when he was thinking of what would happen to the testimony. What greater occupation could we have, beside praising God and engaging ourselves in the service of God, than to be concerned as to how the testimony is going to continue to the end? The end is in mind: "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning" , Eccles 7: 8. Are we going to be available to the Lord to the end, the better side of the dispensation? I trust that we may be able to focus our gaze on the things that are going through. "Lift up your eyes and behold ...", John 4: 35. The Lord Jesus was seeing it. What eyes are His! Who can fathom the Lord's estimate of what He is looking at? It is the product of His own work and He calls on us to look at it. Let us be on the alert to see how things are being maintained in a day of small things, in circumstances of suffering and smallness, and yet the very best coming into evidence. Faith can count on it that it will be better yet; it will be more wonderful as we go on. So Paul says "Love never fails". And Luke was alongside of him at that crucial time, the evidence, from that point of view, that love was not failing .

The scripture in Luke 24 shows how, from the point of view of the Lord's service to His own, love never fails. We are not told just where those two brethren ate their meal, or if they ate it. We know that the "breaking of bread" at that time was a Jewish meal. "He was made known to them in the breaking of bread". Some time ago I heard two Jewish men speaking of sitting down together and breaking bread. The breaking of bread which they had in mind was a supper, a meal; it is a family idea. And here we have two persons travelling home, tired, I suppose, and hungry, finally sitting down to a meal. The Lord is asserting His rights in love. Nothing stops Him from getting through to what is in His mind at any time, where there is a desire to "constrain" Him. Under such circumstances He is unhindered. So it says in this passage, "As he was at table with them, having taken the bread, he blessed, and having broken it, gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognised

him. And he disappeared from them". We are told nothing further about the meal. Immediately, they begin to speak about what happened on the way, and then it says "And rising up the same hour". Whether or not they ate is not the question. It is left for you and me to show that there may come a time when food may be left, if needs be. Assembly life, and getting on with what God has in mind, may have to come first: "My food is that I should do the will of him that has sent me, and that I should finish his work". They recognised Him, He disappeared, and they rose up the same hour and returned to Jerusalem. Nothing further is said of the meal. It leaves it open for you and me to prove at every turn, which may involve deferring the most necessary things of life, that "love never fails".

The Lord would have these persons return to the eleven and those with them. When they went back they had certain things to say, to add to the word "The Lord is indeed risen, and has appeared to Simon". Is that not better than an ordinary meal? They contributed to the joy; they added their jewels to the collection, so to speak. What jewels how He was made known to them in the breaking of bread; how He had spoken to them on the way! Then, as they were saying these things, He himself stood in their midst, and said "Peace be unto you".

Let us be encouraged and the Lord will help us; "love never fails". We are in the best; let us be in it fully, for His Name's sake.

BROOKLYN NY

13 November 1973

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF AN OVERCOMER

S.McCallum

Philippians 3: 7-12; Ephesians 4: 1, 10-13

I wish to say a word on the distinctiveness of an overcomer. We have been speaking about overcoming, as in the Revelation, but I want to refer to the model that we have in Paul as an individual. You will notice that in the passages that I have read his individuality is referred to, and it is a very encouraging thing to have an example set before us in whom this thought of overcoming works in a very distinctive way. If ever there was an overcomer there surely was one in Paul. You might say, Well, none of us here is a Paul; but I think we need to see that he has come before us in the holy writings as a model, in fact he goes so far as to say "Be my imitators": he said it in two epistles which specially I have in mind. So I trust we will be encouraged to see how this thought of overcoming worked in a man of like passions to us. Whatever his commission was, so distinctive, a vessel specially selected by the Lord, an elect vessel as the Lord could speak of him, we want to see also what he was as a man of like passions to us so that we may be encouraged to follow him in the steps of overcoming. There is no use to be platitudinous because we all have to overcome. We would not deny that, I am sure. It is something that one has been thinking a good deal about, the need of overcoming, specially as to overcoming in ourselves.

Some of us are shy, some are aggressive, some are extroverts, some are introverts. You young brothers may think these are peculiar words to use, but an extrovert is one who is not bashful about making known what he or she thinks about themselves; an introvert is a person who is driven in on himself and occupied inwardly with himself. We have to overcome in all these matters.

Then there is the world, the sin system, that is around us in relation to which our baptism has had to do. The moral door out of the world system, the sin system, is through baptism. You remember the word to Paul by a brother: "Arise and get baptised, and have thy sins washed away", Acts 22: 16. You say, I thought the blood of Christ

had to do with the washing away of our sins. It has; John tells us in 1 John 1: that the blood of Jesus Christ, God 's Son, cleanses us from all sin. What wonderful power the blood of Christ has! Let us never lose sight of the blood. It is not only mentioned in Romans, the fundamental epistle in relation to the glad tidings, but it is mentioned in the mature epistles; in church epistles, Ephesians and Colossians, the blood is brought forward. Never let us lose sight of the blood and the way that our guilt has been met a wonderful thing! Mr Darby, in one of his most advanced hymns (No.88), refers to the blood, you will remember: 'We should be part, through Jesus' blood', showing what an appreciation he had of the blood.

I have read from the epistle to the Philippians to show what an overcomer Paul was, so that we may be encouraged. We may be occupied with failure. Sometimes young people get discouraged but I think today is a day of wonderful encouragement, that God should have preserved something that remains, something that is in keeping with the Lord's own heart and desires as in Philadelphia. Not that I am saying that we are Philadelphia (we have had help not to take presumptuous ground in these days) but we walk in the light of the spiritual thoughts that are contained in such as the letter to Philadelphia. This epistle is an epistle that is full of the thoughts of love and confidence. There is in one chapter, reference to two sisters who are not agreeing, but love lies behind the approach of Paul the overcomer even to this matter in Philippi. In Philippi there was no synagogue. You say, What does that have to do with what you are speaking about now? Well, many difficulties arise through features that belong to the synagogue, legal features. The Galatians were greatly troubled by synagogue features. But the remarkable thing about Philippi was that, though sisters were held in honour, two sisters seem to get into difficulty in the course of church history in Philippi. It would not seem that the sisters mentioned in chapter 16 of the Acts are those referred to here by name; they may have been, we do not know but he beseeches them. He does not say, I command you to be of the same mind in the Lord, he beseeches Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. It is

remarkable that this should come into a letter like this that is full of affectionate references; full, I might say, of brotherly love, and especially reference to their love for Paul who was the great minister of the assembly.

Here he is in prison. The second passage that we read refers to that: "I, the prisoner in the Lord". Surely a man like that would have much to overcome. I do not know what you have to overcome; I know what I have to overcome, my wife does too, and no doubt the rest of you know what is to be overcome. We have to overcome in different spheres of life but particularly in relation to assembly life.

There are more brethren in this area than in most places on this continent. Even this gathering now is a large number of brethren to us where there are only seven breaking bread. But thank God we have young people. Thank God for the young people! But there is much to be overcome. What you find with Paul is that while he was a great minister of the assembly he was a great lover of young people. Did you ever notice that? Did you ever notice in his letters his sentiments of affection for young people? You might think Titus was an aggressive kind of person (I suppose he was like Isaiah of whom Paul says "Esaias is very bold", Rom 10: 20). Titus was very bold but Paul says as to him "my own child", Tit 1: 4. Timothy was a man that was given to tears, feelings; Paul says "remembering thy tears", 2 Tim 1: 4. Young people sometimes think they want to show what they are made of and determine that they are not going to be marked by sentimentality but I do not think it was sentimental feelings that Timothy had, they were feelings in relation to the testimony. It is a great thing to be marked by love for the testimony. When I came into fellowship in 1924, when I broke with what I was once connected with, it was a real matter, and it should be a real matter, young people, that you have to break with certain links that you once enjoyed as I did at that time, not only with younger people that I was greatly fond of but with older people. It is a great thing to love the older brethren. It is a great thing when younger brethren come and speak to older brethren; there is something about it that is particularly choice. Paul was ready for that; it was not only Timothy,

not only Titus that he loved in the truth but Onesimus a runaway slave. You say, If you only knew some of the things that entered into my history! Well, did Paul reflect on Onesimus' past history to him personally? He did have to refer to it in writing to Philemon but think of his affection for that young brother, a runaway slave. Paul overcame so many things that are natural to many, and his affection and devotion for the younger brethren were outstanding.

So in this epistle what fulness of joy marked him. We are living in a day of crisis as to energy shortage; they say there will be a food shortage by the end of next year. But here is a man in prison, in chains, and what does he say? "I am full", Phil 4: 18. He does not speak of the shortages he must have encountered in prison, but he refers for instance to the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ: "For I know that this shall turn out for me to salvation, through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ", Phil 1: 19. Even though things are going against him, even though some people were preaching what others thought, wrongly, was the gospel, to him it mattered little as long as Christ was preached. He speaks about their prayers and says "I know that this shall turn out for me to salvation, through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ". In the last chapter Paul refers to supply in a material way (he is a remarkable overcomer) but in the section that I read he is dealing with what he once was, over against what he then was as having been taken possession of by Christ. Is that not a wonderful expression? Have you ever just pondered being taken possession of by Christ? It is not just taking possession of Christ but Christ taken possession of us. What a wonderful thing that is to any who have the consciousness that Christ has taken possession of us! No wonder Paul sets out the experience of an overcomer. Whatever was of value attaching to him naturally in this world, he had to overcome. He might tell you he was a doctor of physics or an M.A., but in what I have read it is evident that he had overcome any renown that attached to him as in the flesh. I am not decrying what people may attain in this way but Paul was not boasting in what he

had acquired and what he had reached on natural lines as some persons do. This chapter is full of Christ.

One thing that marks an overcomer as seen in Paul is right spiritual objectives. It is a great thing to have objectives; even in ordinary life in this world some people get nowhere, as to providing righteously, through lack of objectives. Some people do not know how to work. A Christian should know how to work; Scripture supports that. But Paul says "I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord". He has an objective, and we all want to have right objectives. We want to have right objectives individually in our circumstances. You young brothers, you grow up in the world and get married; an important thing is to have right objectives and provide well for your wife, and your children as they come. That is a real matter in Christianity. Righteousness is our leader and we have to be righteous in all our matters. We have to overcome any laziness that may be with us because laziness never becomes a Christian. Paul overcame all that. Who was a labourer like he was? Who wrought like he did? Even the twelve said it was not right for them to leave the word of God and to serve tables, in that Hellenistic issue that arose in Acts 6; but Paul at the end of Acts knew how to gather sticks and how to keep a fire going for the comfort of those there.

Paul is a model as an overcomer. He was in prison, but he did not write a book about what the guards did when they arrived, or who did this or that to him, he is not filled with that. He is filled with Christ as an Object; he says "to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death". What an overcomer this man was! He really manifested the truth of being desirous of being outside this world and all that marked it morally before God. He wanted to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. He did not say he wanted to know Him and the power of His life as in the gospels, but the power of His resurrection. It is a wonderful thing, dear brethren, if we can so live that, if we have to die and are buried, the grave will not be able to hold us but we will come up out of it in the power of resurrection to

sustain that body of glory that we shall for ever live in with Christ and before God. What an overcomer! What a day we are in for overcoming! The local assembly, do you overcome in it? You remember how Paul, knowing the objective that he had, referred to a brother, Epaphras, he was at Colosse where man's mind had to be combatted in entering into the things of God; "Epaphras, who is one of you, the bondman of Christ Jesus, salutes you, always combating earnestly for you in prayers, to the end that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he labours much for you, and them in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis", Col 4: 12, 13. What objectives that brother had! How old he was I do not know but what objectives he had for his local brethren that they might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Do you criticise your local brethren? Do you think ill of some of them? That is done by some, but think of Epaphras wanting them to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, to come short of nothing where the will of God is concerned .

So this epistle, and especially these verses which I have read, bring out what an overcomer Paul was. He says in verse 11: "if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead". It is a wonderful thing to arrive morally at the resurrection from among the dead; that means you are going to live in another world and not in the light of this world. We have to make our living, we have to provide for things in righteousness, but let us be affected by the power of resurrection and by conformity to Christ's death. You think of His death, think of what conformity to His death would mean, think of how the world was judged in His death; "Now is the judgment of this world" (John 12: 31), He could say, referring to the world as a judged system. We ought to. think of it in that way, in fact we break bread in the light of its overthrow. Every Lord's day we break bread in the light of the overthrow of this world's system. Paul overcame what was in himself, overcame what was in his circumstances, overcame what was in local assemblies. What an example he is for us! So he can speak of joy in this epistle. It is a great thing to have joy in our gatherings: a great thing to enjoy one another. "My joy

and crown" (chap 4: 1) he says of this assembly, "beloved and longed for". Do you long for your local brethren? Are they beloved in your eyes? This is how Paul is before us as an overcomer in the real sense of the word. He did not complain about his circumstances, he did not complain about shortages (he does just refer to them) but he says "my God shall abundantly supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus", chap 4: 19. This is an epistle, not of shortages, but of supply, written by a man in most extreme circumstances of limitations in prison.

So he says in the verses I read in Ephesians, "I, the prisoner in the Lord". He says in the previous chapter, "For this reason I Paul, prisoner of the Christ Jesus". Notice how he speaks of himself personally. Is this wrong ego? I do not think so, this is the right ego. Romans 7 helps us to reach the right ego "I myself with the mind serve God's law" (v 25). It is a great thing to be marked by conscious experience in yourself, especially in the line of which we are speaking now overcoming. So he is prisoner of the Christ Jesus in the third chapter where he relates to us the wonderful character of the assembly and the service of God glory to God in the assembly.

Here in chapter four he is the prisoner in the Lord, but he is overcoming. Now we know the difficulties of circumstances. Some of the older brethren here are living on fixed incomes with rising prices. Some of the businessmen are taxed in relation to shortages of materials and rising prices. All this calls for overcoming. How are we going to overcome in circumstances? Here is a man in prison but he writes the most magnificent church epistles: the greatest epistles that we possess in regard to the church and the church's place with Christ, the greatest epistle dealing with the mystery. Here he is in those circumstances. He is not writing, Did you hear about what is happening to me here? He does say to Timothy, a younger brother, "Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner", 2 Tim 1: 8. Let us not be ashamed of the limited circumstances of the testimony, of the small meetings; let us get through to what excels in glory. At the meeting last night reference was made to the glory that surpasses (see 2 Cor 3: 10). Well, that is

what we are linked with "the surpassing glory" and it ought to lift us in our spirits, cheer us in our souls. However difficult and dark the day may be, the darkening state of things in the assembly publicly, let us remember that there is that which lies above and beyond all that, and which will sustain our souls in spiritual experience in the conscious enjoyment and knowledge of God and Christ and the Spirit, conscious enjoyment of the mystery.

I read the verses that deal with the ministry. Let us see the importance of the ministry, how it proceeds from Christ having ascended above all things and how it is working in view of our arriving at certain objectives. Ministry is not just to entertain us for a few moments, or on a night that we have to spare; ministry as coming from Christ with His authority has in mind definite objectives that we should arrive at. The word 'arrive' is used: "with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith". It is a wonderful thing to go on in the unity of the faith. Unity is a great matter. The Old Testament refers to it in Psalm 133 in a most attractive way. Disagreement is not very attractive, is it? It may be that Euodia and Syntyche would go out of the meeting, one by one side of the hall and the other by the other, so they would not meet and shake hands. That has happened between persons.

What kind of assembly life is that? This has in mind until we all arrive at the unity of the faith. We are walking together in the appreciation of the light that has come to us in a wonderful way as to the assembly. And it says "and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man". Now we all want to arrive at maturity, do we not? The gospels give us maturity in a Man, Matthew, Mark and Luke give us features of that glorious manhood which we see in Jesus. As looking on the glory of the Lord we are all to be changed according to the same image (2 Cor 3: 18).

We do not take character from different images. The world does; they all have their images, whether it be tennis or baseball or football or maybe politics. We are not to be governed by these kinds of ideals or images, we are to be governed by God's pattern of manhood, which the word 'image' refers to, and how God is

represented in that Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says "until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ". Notice this word 'fulness' here; this epistle mentions it a few times. In a day like we are in when nations are in such a chaotic state, we want to see, in the light of the assembly and its relations with Christ and also with God and with the Spirit, the fulness that there is linked with the assembly and to grow in the appreciation of it. It says "the stature of the fulness of the Christ", and it goes on to say that we are no longer children. It is a great thing that we should not act like children but that we should be governed by the stature of the fulness of the Christ which the Gospels allude to. You remember how the king in the Song of Songs refers to the stature of the feminine lover; it is a wonderful thing to think of spiritual stature. Well, in all these things you can see what an example in overcoming Paul is; he is not deterred by circumstances, he can control circumstances both materially and spiritually. In these days of tests that we have been through and still have to go through let us be in the spirit of Paul the overcomer in whom such distinctiveness was seen, in the way that what men think so much of in the way of resources he thought so little of, having before him the importance of what was spiritual and what was linked with the assembly and Christ's relations with it.

May the Lord help us all, young and old, to be overcomers; specially you young people. You have a difficult day to live in, things are made little of that were regarded with horror years back. They may call it puritanical as they think of the days back, but never was there a day in which Sodom and Gomorrah conditions have developed like today, and we want to be overcomers in that as well as in many other things, for His Name's sake.

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THE SPIRIT OF THE DISPENSATION

A.B.Parker

Acts 4: 32-38; Revelation 3: 8-11

These scriptures speak of what was outstanding at the beginning of the dispensation and, clearly, was very precious to heaven; then, in Revelation, there is the indication of what is very precious to the heart of Christ at the end of the dispensation. We are at the end; we cannot have part in what was at the beginning. I do not suppose that will ever be arrived at again, but we can admire what was so wondrously developed at the beginning. Acts 4: 4 says that the number of the men had become about five thousand. That happened very quickly. Three thousand had been added on the day of Pentecost and it says that "they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers ", Acts 2: 42. They persevered not merely continued, but persevered. It would be difficult to imagine so many suddenly put together and all persevering in this way. How devoted and committed they must have been! How very real things were! "Not one said that anything of what he possessed was his own, but all things were common to them ... For neither was there any one in want among them; for as many as were owners of lands or houses, selling them, brought the price of what was sold and laid it at the feet of the apostles; and distribution was made to each according as any one might have need". From the time the law was given, heaven was looking for an answer to it from God's people. Now, the Spirit having come, consequent upon Christ being glorified, the law is being fulfilled by these persons in a remarkable way, not as a legal requirement but in the freshness of love in the Spirit. Galatians 5: 14 says "the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". Here was a demonstration of it - thousands of men, women and children, each loving his neighbour as himself, not considering what he had his own, but having all things common. What a delight to heaven!

The way in which Ananias and Sapphira were dealt with so summarily because they had misrepresented this great movement would indicate how precious it was to heaven. They had attempted to re present themselves as being a part of this living organism in its purely unselfish character, but they were secretly holding back part for themselves. It was not exactly what they did with the property: Peter makes that clear. It was the seriousness of their misrepresentation in claiming to be so wholly in what was proceeding but, in reality, being animated by selfishness. It was a misrepresentation of what was so pleasingly current, and the Spirit of God, through Peter, dealt summarily, in the most severe discipline, with Ananias and Sapphira. It serves to stress how delightful to heaven was the state of the saints.

A somewhat similar situation occurred when Moses smote the rock in Numbers 20. We may think that his so doing was hardly enough cause for Moses to be deprived of going into the land, but his action misrepresented what God had arrived at. He was told to take the staff of Aaron which had budded and to speak to the rock. That staff was the assurance that a new generation would be brought into being through the death of Christ, what is out of Christ; a new generation in which God would find delight. In the anticipation of this He could turn aside from the murmurings of the people: "I will make to cease from before me the murmurings of the children of Israel" Num 17: 5. Actually the murmurings did not cease, but they ceased from before God, because He was going on with what had budded and blossomed and ripened almonds. God is bringing in a people that are of Christ, like Him, and who are going through. God is presently engaged with that. So that when Moses with his rod the rod of authority - smote the rock instead of speaking to it, God told him that he could not go into the land. He had misrepresented the dispensation of grace. I have referred to this because it shows, again, how serious it is to misrepresent what is so precious to the heart of God at any point in the testimony.

We, now, are at the end of the dispensation. We are ashamed of the part we have had in misrepresenting the dispensation in our

day, and we can understand the rightness of God's hand of government upon us; but we justify Him in it because His government expresses His righteousness. But now He would engage us with what is precious to Him and to Christ. The Lord Jesus has indicated that, at by the end of the dispensation, there will be certain in whom heaven will have special delight. We should earnestly desire to be numbered amongst such, dear brethren. Let us never say that we are such persons! Let us never be presumptuous; but let us be in earnest, longing to be a part of the wonderful company of whom the Lord Jesus can say "Thou hast a little power, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name".

Think of what it means to Him, in the presence of the conditions which exist in the profession, of which we are part, to have some who are not denying His name and who are keeping the word of His patience. This gives a moral basis for the Lord to preserve such from the world as it grows worse and worse. He says "I also will keep thee out of the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole habitable world". May we be conscious of being kept! David, in the cave of Adullam, was conscious of being in the shadow of Jehovah's wings (see Ps 57: 1). If we are under His wings we are very near to Him whose wings they are. Think of God putting His wings over us and holding us near! May He ever hold us near! But then there is the other side, for the Lord Jesus has said that He will cause certain persons "to know that I have loved thee". Not only is the Lord's personal love to be known by us, but it will be made evident to those who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie, and those persons will be made to do homage. That is His matter, His prerogative; but it shows how precious it is to the Lord Jesus to have those at the end of the dispensation who are true to Him, "the holy, the true". We know something about being misunderstood. Do we know enough about being understood, and loved? The Lord Jesus knows our motives; He knows our desires; He knows if we have a little strength, if we are not denying His name and if we are keeping the word of His patience. Can we say that we are? What a list from which to take an inventory, to see where we stand spiritually! Are we giving the Lord Jesus occasion to love us? We have the opportunity;

it is our privilege at the very end of the dispensation, at the very time the Lord Jesus had in mind. Are we having part in this? How one longs to be more conscious of being kept, divinely! "I also will keep thee". That seems to be just like the Lord putting His wing over us and holding us near. Whilst being in the midst of the troubled conditions in this world, the trouble does not reach us. We are under the wings of Jehovah, as David could say. May we know more about it, not only for our own satisfaction and comfort, but to increase in the knowledge of God and the love of Christ and the comfort of the blessed Spirit, that we may truly worship God in spirit and in truth, for His Name's sake.

BROOKLYN NY

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HEAVEN'S INTERVENTIONS

D.R.Freeman

Acts 2: 1-4; Matthew 28: 1-10, 18-20; Judges 5: 19-21, 31

I desire, the Lord helping, beloved brethren, to say a word in regard to heaven's interventions. I began, I think rightly, with chapter 2 of the Acts because we have there the beginning of this wonderful period, the present dispensation inaugurated by the coming in of the Spirit of God. Of course, before this there had been remarkable interventions from heaven, the greatest being the coming into this world of the Lord Jesus. How heavenly hosts celebrated that wondrous move on God's part, that that blessed One who is now enthroned in glory should become Man and be found here amongst men! What a wonderful intervention! Indeed, this was the greatest event, I suppose, in time, that the Lord Jesus should be here in manhood and that God's pleasure and glory should be secured through Him. What incalculable results there have been from that wondrous move on the part of God! We shall never forget its consequences as we share in the blessings that have resulted from it, pre-eminently glory to God in the highest and God's pleasure secured in men, men who are like Jesus and with whom God will dwell eternally. What a work of grace He has set on! Luke gives us a wonderful account of that work of grace. The Acts is his second treatise the gospel gives the nativity of Jesus and His path amongst men culminating in the cross. Now in the Acts, his second treatise, this great work had been completed; the Lord Jesus had been amongst His own and they were waiting for heaven's intervention.

How much, beloved brethren, we owe to the presence here of the Spirit of God! There has been no failure with Him, the failure has been in the church on the responsible side. But the Spirit has not left us, He is here and available to us the same way as He was at the outset. Of course, these conditions have never been repeated exactly, the wonderful unity at the outset in this company who were there praying; they were marked by piety and obedience, they obeyed the word of the Lord, they were subject to Him; they had the

guidance of the Scriptures, and they were together as the day of Pentecost was accomplishing, awaiting this wonderful move from heaven. Jerusalem did not know anything about what was transpiring there, but as a result of it the testimony has spread through the whole habitable world, resulting in a wonderful answer to God. So it is not a question of judgment, though the world did its worst at the cross of Jesus and Satan was behind it to obliterate that precious Name "When will he die, and his name perish?" Ps 41: 5.

Here are those who love Him and who are waiting for what was so necessary in view of the testimony, because it involved the speaking that has gone on throughout this wonderful period. It is a time of speaking, "God having spoken ... at the end of these days has spoken to us in ... Son" (Heb 1: 1-2), that is Son-wise; that is the character of His speaking and it is maintained here in the power of the blessed Spirit of God. It says "If any one speak as oracles of God", 1 Peter 4: 11. I think we would be bound to attend to such speaking. So they listened to Peter; Peter's speaking was God's word, there was no question about it for it bore its own credentials as a result of the Holy Spirit coming in. What a wonderful move from heaven, the intercession of Christ and God's love too being behind it. The breathings of God were involved, as another has said, as there came suddenly this sound out of heaven as they were all together in one place. It was evident where it was coming from, not from this world but from on high where Jesus was. He had received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. Peter indicates this later and now He had poured out this which they beheld and heard. So the Spirit's coming from heaven had these wonderful results. We should look more for heaven's interventions, even in these days. This was the beginning and, of course, the last move in this dispensation will be a wonderful move from heaven when the Lord Jesus Himself will descend with that mighty shout, the trump of God and archangel's voice, and the dead in Christ will be raised. What a wonderful intervention that will be! That is what we are waiting for; and should we not be together, should we not be marked by prayer and piety in view of that moment, not dissipating our time, because that event is so close to us and the Lord is preparing His people in view of it?

The Lord had prepared this company in the Acts in view of the Spirit's coming, a divine Person to be with us and in us, to take charge of the testimony. They were to be subject to the Spirit as God; He personally is entitled to worship and regard, for His own will entered into the disposition of the services under the hand of the Lord Jesus. So the Spirit of God is to be regarded and there is His sovereign selection in the assembly. We are the gainers as we recognise it. These principles are to be before us; how we work them out in times of smallness and departure is another question but we need to have the pattern, the divine principles, before us and see how the testimony was inaugurated, and the character, too, of what was established here in heavenly power and grace as the Holy Spirit comes in from heaven to take charge. So it was a sound out of heaven; the breathings of God, someone has said, were involved in that violent impetuous blowing which filled all the house where they were sitting. The fragrance of ointment filled the house in John 12, but here the Spirit is to take charge completely. The will of man is to be set aside and the Spirit is to direct the movements and speaking and testimony of the persons who were there. Of course, they would be subject to the divine order, that is, the men would pray and the men would speak. These are important matters in relation to the assembly which are brought out in 1 Corinthians. How sadly they have been neglected by Christendom and by many who have been near to us, but these things are to be regarded if the Spirit's help and service is to proceed and He is to be ungrieved amongst us.

We should note the difference between the coming in of the Spirit here and His descent on the Lord Jesus. There it was in bodily form as a dove; here in parted tongues as of fire sitting upon each one of them. This does not mean that they should be terrified; we do not read that they were afraid; but we should be thankful for the fire because of the capabilities that are with us, that is in our flesh, of assuming to undertake anything in fleshly will or power in the things of God. The Spirit is against the flesh and the fire is to be accepted by us. It is our salvation to accept it, but then it would carry conviction to others. There needs to be purity with us, pure vessels

whom the Spirit can use, who maintain in a practical way the truth of the death of Christ so that what is of the flesh is absolutely refused as having been judged finally under God's eye at the cross, the Spirit being ever faithful to that. So there appeared to them parted tongues as of fire and it sat upon each one of them. Is there a weak link there? Not at all, for the Spirit is identified with every person in the company. There is no stranger there; but is there a stranger here, a stranger to God's grace? Maybe God's word would come to us with compelling power. Indeed, it says of one who was present at a certain occasion in the assembly that he would fall upon his face and do homage to God reporting that God is amongst you of a truth (see 1 Cor 14: 25). What a remarkable thing! This is the character of God's house, beloved brethren. I admit that we are in days of smallness and breakdown but the character remains; Philadelphia involves that the same character continues until the Lord comes.

What a privilege to have any part in it! But if we are recovered to something we are recovered to the presence and power of this divine intervention of the Holy Spirit come from heaven above, and He will always lead us to the One from whom He has come and to the place from whence He has come, as Rebecca was taken to Isaac; that is the bent of His service. Paul was taken up with the heavenly side in view; we have been reminded of that, the light out of heaven that converted Paul, then Saul of Tarsus, and made him such a wonderful servant bringing in the light of God's purpose before the ages of time. The assembly, beloved brethren, is a heavenly vessel; let us not see it demeaned in our thoughts or in our actions in any way. We are tested as to it but the truth is to be answered to, there is to be a correspondence to the truth, and the Spirit will help us as we recognise His power to accomplish these things. Peter could not have stood, apart from divine power afforded through the Spirit's grace, for he says the gospel is preached by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (see 1 Pet 1: 12). You might have said Peter preached, but Peter says the gospel is preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It has a heavenly ring about it because it is about the One who is there, the One who is enthroned in glory at God's right hand, God's beloved Son.

Now we might think that we are in conditions where these wonderful things are not so applicable. We may be inclined, because of the breakdown, to give up the truth. We may not give it up in terms, but in practice we may, and that has been so in the area where the truth has been recovered. We only have to read Mr Stoney's ministry given about one hundred years ago 'Thoughts for this day' (New Series, Vol 11). I would commend it to the brethren because he was concerned that the truth was being given up in the faith and the practice of the brethren. He stood firm; the number who stand firm may be very few relatively, and that may tend to discourage us; but if we have God in view, like Joshua and Caleb, we will be encouraged and will continue with the heavenly inheritance before us. So Caleb goes right through and is as strong at eighty to go out to war as he is at forty. There is no change with God - what a God we have!

I read from Matthew because the situation there is one of weakness outwardly and brokenness. I think this has special application to ourselves and is for our encouragement and help because there is a wonderful display of power at the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Of course, in that act itself, the Father raising His Son by His glory, never has such power been witnessed "the surpassing greatness of his power ... the might of his strength, in which he wrought in the Christ in raising him from among the dead", Eph 1: 19, 20. Creation's worlds are wonderful, God's power exhibited in creation, but (as a sister once said to me she was bedridden) resurrection is God's masterpiece. That is an interesting word. It is God 's answer to all the power of Satan, because the One who went down into death is the One who has come forth out of it, a glorious, living Man triumphant for ever, the One about whom we sang together. Well, we are to be in the faith of that. The disciples, though few at the resurrection of Jesus, did not recall the Lord's words. I suppose their hearts were bowed with sorrow as they felt the loss of One who had been everything to them. They lacked nothing when the Lord was with them, such was the character of His life and presence amongst them here, as He says, "Did ye lack

anything?" Luke 22: 35. But now it was different, He had been taken by wicked hands; that is what the world did with Jesus. It is the character of the world in which we are, it is still unchanged in New York or Kingston or wherever we are, and its princes crucified the Lord of glory. But how are we moving in the presence of these things? Here is this little number, and outwardly their defencelessness is stressed, they are women; Mary of Magdala and the other Mary came to look at the sepulchre; but then God had intervened, not only in the resurrection of Jesus but in an earthquake, showing what He can do. In the Acts (chap 4: 31) the place where the brethren were assembled shook. I suppose it was an earthquake. It was not to terrify them. Jacob was afraid in the presence of God; but if God intervenes we are to realise it is on behalf of His people. As we are together God may give us an indication that He is for us and that none is going to withstand us either, for the testimony is going to go through triumphantly in spite of all that Satan may seem to have done.

Satan had gained a great inroad here in the defection of Judas, the number is incomplete in this section of Matthew but there is a wonderful display of power from on high. So an angel descends from heaven, and he was a commissioned angel too, he was given this task to do. God has myriads of angels at His bidding. As Christians we have come to an innumerable company of angels; they are near to us. They have their place around the throne in Revelation 5, and they are near to the redeemed; not that they have any part in the benefits of the work of Christ, but they take account of the results of it adoringly. These are the holy angels, and this one is sent at God's bidding on behalf of His people to roll the stone away, not for Jesus to rise, for nothing could detain him in death, but that they might look into the tomb and see the wonderful triumph that God had wrought. He says "Come, see the place where the Lord lay". But they were not to stay there; the word is "Come", and then "Go", go tell the story. As we take account of what God has done, what Jesus has done, we can go and tell it, over and over again. We love to hear the story of the glad tidings, the story of the mighty

triumph of the Saviour who went into death for us and broke its power and has risen victorious over the grave. So here their hope seemed gone but they had direction from the angel. God will always give some indication of His mind, even in these weak circumstances as they are publicly. Matthew helps us as to the public position; it is where righteousness is to be regarded. Though the position is small we are still to be marked by righteousness. We are to "pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart", 2 Tim 2: 22. God will come in and His intervention can be taken account of in regard to such. So here heaven is intervening, an angel of the Lord descended out of heaven and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. The Roman power was very great, and prevalent everywhere at this time, but there was a greater power. Let us be assured of this that, if we are brought before men in testimony, there is a greater power to be borne witness to and God can intervene in this way. He generally uses His people but His power is seen in this one angel, thus indicating that God despised the power of Rome, and of the Jews too, whose influence caused the sepulchre to be sealed and a Roman watch to be set lest the story should be told that He was risen from the dead.

Could He be detained by that? No, indeed! This angel is God's intervention on behalf of those who were faithful to the cross, who had followed the Lord, who were still available and who, though sorrowing, came to the tomb. The angel gives them direction, he is in triumph, he says to the women "Fear not ye". What a difference!

Others might fear, the guards trembled and became as dead men, but there were words of sympathy and light for the women. How beautiful that heaven is sympathetic! The administration of the world to come, as Mr Coates says, is going to be marked by intense sympathy. Heaven is the place of sympathy because the One whom we know is there, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, sin apart. We might say never have divine sympathies been set out more than at the present time because of the One who has suffered being there and able to succour those who are tempted in this wilderness pathway here. So heaven is sympathetic and the angels partake of that sympathy: "Fear not ye". The angel makes a difference: "for I

know that ye seek Jesus the crucified one". How did He know that? I think it indicates what is going on in heaven for God is speaking about His people and the angels hear about us. If a young brother or young sister confesses the Lord, they are spoken about in heaven. It is a wonderful thing to have your name mentioned in heaven. The angels are to serve us, God gives them charge concerning us to keep us in all our ways; they are sent out on account of those who shall inherit salvation (see Heb 1: 14). Let us not think that heaven is inactive: for it is full of activity, and conversation too. God loves to speak about His people. On one occasion He spoke about Job and we know the results of that. God loves to draw attention to His people here and He has in view the blessing and preservation of what is precious to himself. So the angel says "I know"; he knew who they were for he was sent to serve them. He says "I know that ye seek Jesus the crucified one".

How beautiful that is! They were not ashamed of the cross of Christ. How easily we may feel burdened because of the reproach connected with the testimony but it is the position of power, and we cannot dissociate the reproach of Christ from the presence and service of the Spirit of God. He will always be available to serve those who accept the reproach connected with the cross of Jesus.

So what a tribute the angel gives to these women! They had followed Jesus and now were seeking Him among the dead. But the angel gives them light concerning the resurrection. Heaven loves to give light to those who are in any sense affected by God's interventions. So he says "He is not here, for he is risen, as he said". He would remind them of that. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay"; the tomb was empty. There was never a tomb like the tomb of Jesus for there was no corruption there. What a remarkable place to take account of! It was empty, the Lord had risen from the dead. Wonderful fact, and great subject of the preaching! If He was still there we are still in our sins, but now He is risen and we are justified in Him, a glorious, living Man in the presence of God. So they are brought from being downcast into triumph. They were told to go and tell His disciples that He was risen what a wonderful message! "and behold, he goes before you". The Lord is leading in

broken conditions, He does not give up His rights in relation to His own, and the place, too, where divine power can be known: "He goes before you into Galilee". He is linked with the place of reproach here and, as we accept it beloved brethren, we will find Him and enjoy His company and have the gain of His word that all power is given to Him. So they go out quickly with fear and great joy running to bring His disciples word. Then, as they went, Jesus met them. No greater person could meet them, no greater person could meet us than the Lord Himself. He is coming to meet us soon, He will come Himself; He is not going to send an angel. Here an angel was first sent to speak to these women, a little handful of them. You might say, Everything is broken up. But now everything is under divine control, all power is with the Man who is at God's right hand.

So He Himself met them and what does He say to them? "Hail!"

This would show, I think, the importance of respect for the people of God, for the Lord regards them in this remarkable way as He salutes them. They rightfully do homage to Him but He indicates His mind as to them. If the Lord indicates His mind as to His saints, though in great feebleness and reproach (because that is where we are), then we should do well to take note of it and be concerned that we do not bring anything in which is otherwise in regard to His people. The reproach is considerable but these persons are saluted by Jesus in the circumstances of reproach; the Lord regards them as those who jeopardized their lives in affection for Him, in coming to the tomb they were publicly associated with His crucifixion, His rejection here. And that is where we are as we come together to break bread, beloved brethren, feeling the conditions around us and the reproach, maybe the misunderstanding of our brethren; but the Lord understands these circumstances and, not only is He sympathetic with us and helps us in them, but He is marked by remarkable regard for those who are found in this way. This is to strengthen us the Lord salutes them. Paul saluted the assembly, we are to salute one another.

Respect is very important as linked with the saints in the testimony here. We might say that we have right regard for the brethren because of their place as seated in the heavenlies in Christ but how do we act practically? What about the saint, who is in reproach and

suffering for the name of Christ? The Spirit of God is linked with such an one, and we are to regard brethren who stand faithfully in the truth; we are to be in the current of God's mind in regard to such.

Here in Matthew it was a broken position, the number is eleven, but the commission is given to them, the preaching and testimony is to go on. We know the number was made up in the Acts, the complete number was there when the Spirit came. God has completion in view and we need to keep the full thought in our minds, yet not to weaken in our efforts or work on account of the number being broken, because all power is in the hand of Jesus and He is going to complete everything and be with His people, all the days, until the completion of the age. So things are going to be completed rightly I believe; the saints are going to be ready for the rapture and the Spirit and the bride will say, Come. What a privilege to have part in it and to have part in the victory now! It will be a wonderful victory song then when we are around the throne. What songs there will be! Who would be out of it? Surely our hearts should be stirred at the prospect that is before us when that wonderful note resounds to Him who loves us and has washed us from our sins in his blood (see Rev 1: 5) and ascends from that redeemed throng who have their part and place in heaven in the companionship of Jesus eternally, for we shall be with Him and like Him. What a wonderful prospect and what a glorious victory too!

The last trumpet, that is the last move, has in view the final triumph: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly", Rom 16: 20. We wait for that moment but that does not mean that we are not in victory now.

So Deborah would help us. We referred to the palm-trees a little earlier; we are to be victorious in adverse conditions, indeed faith feeds on the difficulties. The men of faith said that the giants would be food for them; so the difficulties are food for us, they are not to terrify us. You might say, I do not know how I am going to get through this week or another year. But the worse the difficulty is, the more it becomes food for the Christian and the more it is intended to cast us on God in a practical way to help us through,

especially as it concerns His testimony, because that is the main reason why we are left here. God will help us in our circumstances but the main thing is His service and His testimony. So Deborah was in triumph, and the verses I read indicate the way heaven comes in. The people of Israel were under great pressure because of Jabin's army; the captain was Sisera; he had nine hundred chariots of iron. Think of the way God's people were ground under, but there was one woman who had the mind of God. It was not even a brother, for she has to say, Up, to Barak, and she goes with him too. He would go, he said, if she went. What a wonderful character she has! So she has this song and Barak joins with her. It is a good thing to have part in the victory song now. God gives us to taste the victory; that word is in 1 Corinthians 15 which is the resurrection chapter "Thus also is the resurrection of the dead" (v 42). The doxology is "But thanks to God, who gives us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.57). The intervention on heaven's part in Judges is in the stars, here seen in a militant way. Shining for God as they do, here they are fighting. Whoever heard of stars fighting? They are fighting in their courses with Sisera, that is, they are not independent. A great bane is independent activity in the sense in which one is independent of the Lord and of the Spirit's help and of the word of God. We need to be marked by increasing dependence so that we move unitedly in the path of God's will. Independency springs from man's will, and we cannot maintain the conflict rightly in that way at all; we have to come to an end of it, however right it may seem. So special associations of brethren because of certain views are not going to help the testimony forward at all, in fact they will hinder it; but we need to be united on the basis of the truth under the Lord's direction. The enemy is very active, but here the stars in their courses are fighting with Sisera, that is, they are moving in their divinely-appointed pattern and not departing from it, they are abiding by principles; and God intervenes through these heavenly bodies.

His people were fighting but Deborah recognises that there was intervention from another source, that is from heaven. Where would we be, beloved brethren, without heaven's interventions? They are seen, as one has sought to show, in the coming in of the Spirit of

God, in angelic service and special help in a day of brokenness, and in a militant way so that the saints might be preserved and the land might have rest. This is always in view in any conflict for the truth, that the saints might enjoy the inheritance. What an inheritance we have! As the ark goes forward to seek out a resting place (see Num 10: 33, 36) conflict has to be entered into; but rest is in view in all the militant movements connected with the testimony of God. So Deborah has this song for she is triumphant, and the conclusion is that God's enemies, not our personal enemies; we would not desire that for any such. Stephen and Paul are examples for us. Stephen says "Lord, lay not this sin" that was against him "to their charge", Acts 7: 60. Paul says "May it not be imputed to them" (2 Tim 4: 16) because they did not stand with him. How sad it was that he stood alone! How sad it is when brethren are forced to stand alone! But he says "The Lord stood with me, and gave me power, that through me the proclamation might be fully made, and all those of the nations should hear". How remarkable that the Lord intervened in Paul's testimony! It was heaven's intervention in the Lord Himself, He stood by him in his defence. Well, thank God there are brethren who are standing. How we need to love them and to value them! So Deborah says "Let them that love him". She is not thinking only of herself and Barak but she widens out in her affections to include every lover of God; "But let them that love him be as the rising of the sun in its might". We want the benign sway of the knowledge of God to spread abroad; as Paul says, "His knowledge through us in every place", 2 Cor 2: 14. "Let them that love him be as the rising of the sun in its might", that heavenly orb placed there by God to rule the day. This benign influence is to spread through those who are lovers of God and who have been secured by His wonderful intervention in the time scene, through the blessed Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus and through the glorious glad tidings which are preached in His Name and in the power of the blessed Spirit sent from heaven. May God thus encourage and help us for His Name's sake.

Brooklyn NY

26 January 1974

THE CHILDREN'S CONFIDENCE

As the verses have been numbered, the middle of the whole Bible is Psalm 118 verse 8, and of this the middle word is the name by which God was known to His people Israel. The psalmist, unnamed, had learned the necessity of trusting in Him rather than in man.

Now that God has been made known as Father by, and in, the Lord Jesus we have even more reason for trusting Him. For one thing, Jesus said that our Father in the heavens will give good gifts to those who ask of Him. These are gifts that He sees are good for us and the greatest is doubtless the Holy Spirit which God gives to those who obey Him. The apostle John writes especially to the little children because they know the Father, so we do not have to wait for this until we are grown-up. Although we cannot entrust the salvation of our souls to any but God Himself, we can put confidence in those, like John, to whom He entrusts His word. The following may help you to remember his first epistle.

In the first chapter he *guides* us to walk in the light, which means being honest in everything. In the second he *grades* us into old and young persons and little children so that we may each know God in a suitable way. In chapter three he *girds* us up to practice always what is right even as God is righteous. Next he *goads* us on to show love to one another because love is of God our Father. The last chapter *guards* us, being God's children, from the wicked one.

Do you keep yourself in the love of God, looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?

J.C.Evershed