

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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THE POWER OF THE KINGDOM

A.B.Parker

Luke 10: 25-35

I do not need to apologise for reading so well-known a passage because we never can exhaust Scripture. It is a question of its application to current need. When we think of the countless myriads who are approaching the throne of grace to find help in time of need, and of Christ 's priestly service in the presence of God, we may get some little idea of the immensity of the service that is being carried on, in favour of believers, in heaven. Christ's administration is far greater than anything we can comprehend. Need I say that He is able to meet every need in this room? We may not be aware of having need, but He is able to make us aware of our need as well as meeting it. Therefore, may it please Him to use this occasion for our help.

The Lord Jesus asked the blind men in Matthew 9, "Do ye believe that I am able to do this?" (v 28). They said to Him "Yea, Lord", and they received their sight. In Mark 9 the Lord Jesus said to the man who asked, "if thou couldst do anything, be moved with pity on us", "The 'if thou couldst' is if thou couldst believe: all things are possible to him that believes" (v.23). What an answer that man gave! He said "I believe, help mine unbelief". Such an attitude amongst us would give the blessed Spirit liberty to bring in something of the power of the kingdom for our encouragement and blessing.

Our passage speaks of a lawyer standing up and tempting Jesus. It is a very serious thing when what we know, or think we know, prevents us from getting the help the Lord is ready to give.

When the Lord asked him what is written in the law, he answered well and the Lord acknowledged this. We might think that this is the kind of brethren we need in our meetings, but the question is not just what we know, it is what we are. I believe that what follows in this chapter relates to just that. I do not know if it was a young man who

was on the way to Jericho, but we usually refer to him in that way. Perhaps the younger men have the greater tendency to go that way, but it says also that a certain priest happened to go down that way, so we must not restrict our thoughts to the younger men. The young have life before them and usually have ambition and energy which Satan would seek to divert from the 'way everlasting'. Jericho may be said to represent the sphere of man's ideals. It was the re-built Jericho - re-built by a man who defied the curse that he who re-built the city "In his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and in his youngest shall he set up its gates", Josh 6: 26. (See also 1 Kings 16: 34) Think what men will do, what they will sacrifice to accomplish an ideal! Paul warns the Colossians against philosophy and vain deceit and the elements of the world, which the enemy would use to hinder them from getting into their heavenly inheritance. We are all liable to be affected by the world in this idealistic character. You may not want to go in for anything wicked or corrupt, but may desire a little broader scope than being narrowed down to an out-of-the-world position. But let us remember the words of the Lord Jesus when He said to the Father, "They are not of the world, as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by the truth: thy word is truth", John 17: 16,17. Let us not be attracted by the world even in its idealistic character; it is a downward path.

In His parable of the vineyard in Mark 12 the Lord Jesus referred to a fence being built around it. That fence, I believe, is related to the power of the kingdom; it is for our protection. If we disregard it and break through it a serpent will bite us (see Eccles 10: 8). This man on the Jericho road had, in effect, disregarded the 'fence'. He was in an exposed position on his downward way and he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, inflicted wounds and left him half dead. God has an armoury full of means by which He can interrupt us if we insist on going the wrong way. He may not, of course, interfere and that would be very serious. Falling into the hands of robbers was, after all, a mercy in disguise for it prevented the man from getting to Jericho. In his folly he had to go through that experience, but it would have been worse if God had allowed him to

fulfil his intention to go to Jericho. Although he had left Jerusalem, the area of kingdom administration, the kingdom was pursuing him in grace. "If any one sin, we have a patron with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous", 1 John 2: 1. I am considering this man as a believer. As such he was of very real interest to heaven. God is "preserver of all men, specially of those that believe", 1 Tim 4: 10.

Are not God's feelings toward failing believers? Is not the power of the kingdom available to such in grace? It operated on behalf of this man through the Samaritan. It operates through Christ our rejected Lord. Are you rejecting His interest in you? Are you deaf to His appeals? Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. The priest and Levite in this chapter would be respected in Israel, but they were of no help to the wounded man. It was the Samaritan, who had no acceptance with the Jews, who came to his help. And so the Lord Jesus, although now in heaven, is ready to use the power of the kingdom to succour those who, through wandering, are in distress.

The Samaritan took this man's case on. Would you not like the Lord Jesus to take your case on? Do you not really want to be wholeheartedly committed to the pleasure of the Lord? Do you not really want to be a true disciple of Jesus? Do you feel, however, that there is not sufficient to make you enthusiastic about Christianity and separation from the world? Would you like the Lord Jesus to take your case on? Why not ask Him to do so? Will He do it? He may not do it right away, for He may wait to see if you really want to be different; He may wait for your exercises to deepen. But this man's case was taken on by the Samaritan and it has been recorded to show us what the Lord is prepared to do.

Perhaps Christ's advocacy is already at work on your behalf. Is the righteousness of God's throne demanding, in your case, that the soul that sins must die? The man on the Jericho road was half dead. Because of the death of Christ, God is holding the world in reconciliation. God's attitude is that of grace; grace is on the throne; grace reigns through righteousness, but righteousness must be satisfied. And the advocacy of Christ in relation to believers is part of the administration of the grace of the kingdom. He pleads His

own finished work, His precious shed blood; the throne of God is satisfied and grace is extended toward you while the Spirit works with you to bring about a change so that you judge yourself and allow the Lord Jesus to lead you in the way of righteousness. It may be necessary that you fall into the hands of robbers before you submit to the Spirit's dealings with you. May you be exercised and yield to the appeal of grace.

As we have said, the Samaritan took this man's case on. First of all he bound up his wounds. What comfort in having our wounds bound up! It must be done in righteousness, but who can bind up like the Lord? Who can understand us like He does? He is a Man and God has committed judgment into His hands because He is Son of man. He knows the feelings of men; He knows the temptations that afflict you and me. We fail, but He never submitted to temptation. He knows how weak we are: "He remembereth that we are dust", Ps 103: 14. And in His compassions He makes a difference. He may deal much more severely with me than He would with you, for instance, for He is wholly just in all His ways. It is the power of the kingdom nevertheless.

Next we are told that the Samaritan poured in oil and wine. Righteousness would be involved in binding up the wounds; peace is suggested in the oil and joy in the wine. These three elements of the kingdom are operating today: "The kingdom of God is... righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit", Rom 14: 17. Righteousness must be established first; it was right that this man should fall into the hands of robbers. It was right that Job should be afflicted. All God's ways are righteous. If they are thus recognised the 'afterwards' will yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby. The acceptance of this makes way for the oil - the peace of God which guards our hearts and thoughts by Christ Jesus; and then the wine is poured in - joy unspeakable and filled with the glory.

The Lord met Saul of Tarsus on a downward course - from Jerusalem to Damascus. That was a murderous course! And yet he was met in grace. First, he was struck down and blinded. That was

righteousness, but along with it the Lord said to him "It is hard for thee to kick against goads", Acts 26: 14. That was like the beginning of the pouring in of the oil. He would get further peace later, but when Ananias came to him and, having laid his hands on him, said "Saul, brother", that would be the experience of the wine being poured in. What joy it would bring into his soul! The Lord delights in showing grace. He is ready to do it with each one of us when there is repentance and self-judgment.

The Samaritan also put the man on his own beast and took him to the inn. That indicates, I believe, where the blessed Spirit comes into the matter; it is the power of the kingdom operating to bring us into an area of care. Care is an element of the kingdom, operating on our behalf in view of complete recovery. I would like to feel that the Lord can take account of our local companies as spheres of care and comfort where He can bring persons who have been damaged and are in need of healing. The Lord is recovering persons, more so in Britain than in this country, though we are thankful that quite a number have been recovered over here, but can our companies be regarded by the Lord as places to which He can bring persons needing care? Are we rightly caring for those who already to be numbered amongst us? Or are we tending to let things drift? Do we allow questionable matters to go on too long before raising questions? The Lord is looking for spheres where care is administered, spheres to which He has unhindered access, spheres which submit fully to His control. The Samaritan took the man to the inn; he took care of him, not only on the Jericho road, but in the inn until the morrow, and then turned him over to the care of the innkeeper. May the Lord find our local companies places where He can do the same? The place to which the man was taken was an inn. What kind of persons put up in an inn? Usually they are transients. Are we such? Are we those whose roots are not deep down in the earth, but are ready to move on at the Lord's word? The innkeeper would be looking for the return of the Samaritan. Our 'inn' should be characteristically a place where persons are looking for the coming of the Lord - ready to depart on the morrow; spending the night of

Christ's rejection in out-of-the-world conditions. How quickly would that man recover in such an environment!

One has sought to illustrate the power there is in the kingdom and how it is operating on behalf of the saints. Ere long an hour of trial is coming on the whole habitable world which will affect those who dwell upon the earth. But the Lord is coming for His own; therefore we do not wish to be earthdwellers but an out-of-the-world people, giving the Lord a righteous basis for saving us out of that terrible hour. May the Lord encourage us in these things.

PLAINFIELD NJ

26 July 1975

FEATURES WHICH BENEFIT LOCAL COMPANIES

J.Renton

1 Corinthians 16: 15-18; Colossians 4: 12,13; Acts 20: 28-35

The scriptures read refer to persons in certain localities whose presence there was for the good of those localities. It was a great advantage to Paul, in writing his first epistle to the Corinthians, to know that there was the house of Stephanas there. Much of what he wrote was severe and there was rebuke, but it would be a comfort to him to know that there was actually in that locality a certain household which represented what was right and which represented qualities that could be taken on by others in Corinth. Paul sent Timothy to Corinth; it was an advantage to Paul to send Timothy, here. Timothy was the beloved and faithful child of his father, Paul.

He represented Paul's spirit and attitude; he represented the product of Paul's preaching; he represented the moral character of Paul. It was also a great advantage to the Corinthians to have a visitor like Timothy amongst them. In our movements amongst the brethren we ought to provide some advantage to the locality which we visit. It would be abnormal to visit a locality and be a sorrow or a burden. As we visit localities we should present some advantage, some encouragement, represent something that is going to help the brethren locally. Paul also sent Titus to Corinth, and he would represent Paul too. There would be a certain definiteness and courage with Titus. Paul sent both Timothy and Titus there, and they would both represent their father, Paul, perhaps in different features, but both the visits would be an advantage to the locality in Corinth.

Great encouragement as Timothy would be, he was only a visitor. He was just there for a time and then left again, and so was Titus, he was a visitor and he left; but the house of Stephanas was in the locality, it was part of the locality. Paul says here, "Ye know the house of Stephanas" - that is conscious knowledge. They had not regarded that house as they ought to. Had they regarded the house of Stephanas as they ought to their behaviour would have been different. Paul writes, "I beseech you, brethren... that ye should also

be subject to such". He mentions in parenthesis, "Ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the saints for service". I suppose we are justified in thinking that this household consisted of a father, a mother and possibly young people. We have such households in our localities. Such an asset as the house of Stephanas in Corinth could not be calculated. We have been speaking about Corinth and things that were going on there: there were divisions amongst them. No doubt there were local leaders and some were saying, 'I am for this one' and 'he is my man', and so on. Here is the house of Stephanas, which Paul commends. We need to appreciate the potentiality, dear brethren, of a household like this in our locality. No doubt the husband and wife in that house of Stephanas would be one in outlook, one in attitude towards the truth, one in attitude in service towards their local brethren, because it says, "they have devoted themselves" - devoted themselves. It is something they took on. The note indicates that it is like an officer appointed to a regiment. The officer has to wait until he is appointed, but this household appointed themselves for service, dedicated themselves. This was a dedicated house in this city of Corinth where things were so difficult. What an advantage to have a household like this!

Whether we have been householders for a long time or Whether we are just starting, what a privilege to dedicate the house to the saints for service as this house was. The parents would initiate this and then the young people, apparently, came into it because it is spoken of as one thing - the house of Stephanas. Husband and wife, father and mother, may set out with the right idea, but, if I may address for a moment young people in a godly house, you may bring in something that is contrary, something that is not going to help, something that is not going to add to the saints for service. How watchful we need to be! How watchful parents need to be! How watchful young people need to be that they are always in accord with the house as being dedicated to the saints for service! Mr Darby in his note here corrects what he writes. He writes: 'the family of Stephanas had appointed themselves to the saints for service - given themselves up to serve them, or rather given themselves up to

them. They were not devoted only to the service, but devoted to the saints for service. That was a house in Corinth who loved the local brethren as Paul loved them. When Paul wrote in chapter 4 about sending Timotheus, he referred to him as his "beloved and faithful child" (v 17), but he addresses the Corinthians as his "beloved children" (v 14). He could not say about them 'my beloved and faithful children' because they were not a faithful representation of their father, but Timothy was. Nevertheless the Corinthians were his beloved children. With all the faults and with all the difficulties in Corinth, apparently the house of Stephanas loved the local brethren just as Paul loved them. It is easier, as we all know, to love brethren at a distance. It is easier to go to a locality and love all the saints when you do not know their past history, nor what may be their faults and failings; but here was a house in Corinth who were devoted to the local saints for service. That house was valuable and was an asset in the place. When Paul was writing to the Corinthians it was an advantage to them to know that there was at least one house there which apparently was complete in its devotedness to the saints for service. We do not see any indication of Stephanas being a gifted man, or a minister or a preacher. His services in that way are not referred to; his house is referred to.

I would like to encourage each one of us to have our house intact for this purpose. The enemy is always busy; he has been busy - alas! He has been able for the moment to secure some of our young people - I say, for the moment. The enemy never slackens, never gives up. If Paul knew the advantage of the house of Stephanas in Corinth, you may take it that the enemy knew too, and he would endeavour somehow to corrupt that house of Stephanas in Corinth. But apparently things were maintained there. I would like to encourage us all to have our households devoted in this way to be a help, a stay, a support, an asset, in our localities. Some of our localities consist of not more than one household. Think of how much falls on such households in localities at the moment. Such households would be on the outlook for persons to be affected by the gospel or by the truth, and for persons who have lost their way to

return. We are living in a time of recovery, of revival, of returning. We were referring to Luke 15 to the returning younger son; he went into the far country but came to himself and returned. The father ran, fell upon his neck and covered him with kisses before the younger son said anything, before he opened his mouth. He had made up his mind what he would say, but before he could say anything, "while he was yet a long way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell upon his neck and covered him with kisses". It was the father who covered the distance. He did not wait until the younger son had come all the way, he covered the distance; and then, after he is covered with kisses, the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee". How important it is, how obligatory upon every one of us it is to be on the outlook for persons who can be recovered!

In the second scripture we come to the assembly in Colosse and there is a man there called Epaphras. Now Epaphras was a gifted man. Epaphras is referred to as a "faithful minister of Christ for you", Col 1: 7. Apparently he was local in Colosse, but he is a minister, he is a preacher; in fact it would appear from the first reference to him in the first chapter that some at least may have been converted through Epaphras. They owed the fact that they were taught to Epaphras. He was a teacher and a preacher and a minister, and he was local in Colosse. We have a number of preachers; we are thankful for every one of them. Epaphras would not take up the service of preaching as a mere duty. Sometimes when a brother is asked to preach he is very reluctant, he does not really want to preach and he is glad when it is over. That was not Epaphras. Epaphras was set to get results from his preaching. He was set to see the work of God progressing. He would be earnest and urgent in it; he would be prayerful about it. It certainly would be a duty to a preacher to preach, but it ought not to be merely a matter of duty, it ought to be a matter into which he would put his whole heart and soul. That, no doubt, was Epaphras here. We should be like him in the preaching. There should be heart and soul in it; there

should not just be a nominal setting out of things but there should be urgency and definiteness and we should be looking for results. We can be formal and take up something and be glad it is over, and be glad of a little help maybe. There needs to be more devotion to this matter: whether it is preaching or giving a word in a ministry meeting or making a contribution in a reading or any kind of service on the principle of gift, there needs to be a certain devotedness in what is undertaken. Of course, God is sovereign and God can use anyone.

Some have been converted through women preachers; we are glad when they are converted any way, but this matter of urgency and definiteness and devotion to service of this kind is important.

Paul in the first reference to Epaphras speaks about "the grace of God, in truth: even as ye learned from Epaphras", chap 1: 6,7.

These Colossians had come a good long way in the truth; Paul commends them as to how far they had come and, apparently, he gives some credit to Epaphras who was local amongst them. In our localities, what is our purpose, what is our outlook? How testing this is! If we are looking for prominence, be assured we will clash with somebody else. It says, "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". What a fulness marked this man! What a fulness in his prayers! This fulness of purpose would colour all his activity in his own locality or wherever he was. Paul says in chapter 2, "For I would have you know what combat I have for you" (v 1) and here is Epaphras in the same combat, "combating earnestly for you in prayers", overcoming obstacles, set for the welfare of his brethren, "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". That is a minister in a locality. We should thank God for everyone who has been given some measure of gift to help the saints, but to such I would say, be in this attitude of prayer, have this purpose, this outlook that Epaphras had, that the saints might stand "perfect and complete in all the will of God" or, as it may be

read, 'in every will of God'. That must involve that Epaphras himself was entirely committed to all the will of God. He would not be able to help others into what he was not in himself. He must, in the place, have represented something of this purpose, which was really God 's purpose for them, and certainly Paul's purpose for them.

Now in Acts 20 it is not a question of gift; it is a matter of eldership. Paul sent over for the elders at Ephesus. These were persons in the locality at Ephesus who took on responsibility. In the time of Acts 20 such persons were appointed to exercise oversight.

They were called overseers or elders. Now, this is a most important feature to be found in our localities. They are not appointed today, they are not official; nevertheless the element of overseership is a very important feature to be in every locality. Paul in this chapter speaks of himself as having been among them for three years. He calls attention to himself as an example to these overseers. He was a model for them and he puts it on these overseers to continue as he had been among them. How Paul was among the saints in Ephesus is a very high level indeed, but he puts it on these overseers to continue the service he had exercised among them for three years.

They are called elders in verse 17: "he called over to him the elders of the assembly" at Ephesus; and they are called overseers in verse 28. We do not have appointed official elders now, but every locality is to have the feature of elderhood and overseership. Elders in cities are not mentioned singly in the New Testament; they are mentioned as together, persons who would carry responsibility and be concerned for the spiritual welfare of the local brethren, because overseership or eldership applies to service locally. They are not necessarily gifted although they might be gifted persons. They are persons who hold office and yet not officially, persons who would be answerable to God, answerable to the Lord for the welfare of their local brethren. So Paul says "Take heed therefore to yourselves".

How important that is! "Take heed therefore to yourselves, and to all the flock, wherein the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers, to shepherd the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own". That was Paul's own estimate of the assembly,

Paul's own estimate of the saints at Ephesus. It is the secret behind the activity and labours of Paul in that city. Why did he expend himself so much? He speaks about "night and day" (v 31), "with all lowliness" (v 19). He speaks about teaching you "publicly and in every house" (v 20). How extensive and devoted was his service!

What was the secret of Paul's service? It was his love for the assembly of God which God "has purchased with the blood of his own". It is the level at which he viewed these saints at Ephesus and so did not spare himself in service for them. "For I know this, that there will come in amongst you after my departure grievous wolves, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall rise up men speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them". "From among your own selves" - from amongst these very overseers he was addressing he saw what could come in, how Satan could come in and spoil that work at Ephesus, which, of course, he did. Paul parts with them at the end of this chapter 20.

The next they would hear from Paul would be the Ephesian letter, written from Paul in prison, containing three chapters of the glory and dignity of their calling, and three chapters of exhortation that they should walk worthy of the calling wherewith they had been called.

The next letter they received, according to the scriptural record, was by John from the Lord Himself. The externals were still all right at Ephesus, externals went on as if everything were all right, but the Lord says "I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love", Rev 2: 4. The pristine freshness of what was set up in Ephesus was left. The Lord saw the decline and fall of this very assembly here at Ephesus. Now Paul lays the responsibility here on these overseers. You will notice that, when the Lord sends by John the letter to Ephesus, it is the angel who is addressed, the responsible element; it is in principle this overseeing element that is addressed as held responsible by the Lord for the state of the locality.

This matter of eldership is a most important thing. We have had examples of how the saints ought to be served, the level at which they ought to be served. It is not official, but it is a very necessary service in every locality that some persons should

undertake. He says "Wherefore watch". Watchfulness is one of the activities of the overseers. We need to maintain watchfulness in our localities that things do not come in that ought not to come in, and exercises do not drag on that ought not to drag on. The principle of overseership is how government and control take place locally, how authority is exercised; of course, exercised in grace but nevertheless there is to be authority that things are not allowed to come in that ought not to come in and things are not allowed to drag on Which ought not to drag on. Paul lays the whole weight of it on the overseers. "Wherefore watch, remembering that for three years night and day, I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears". Dear Mr Parker referred to this scripture at Buckie about admonishing each one of you, no doubt including young persons.

He spoke about a young man in Ephesus who might have been fond of sport. Paul would get alongside him and admonish him with tears, wean him from his love of sport or whatever it may be to something more worthy of a believer. How varied is the work of the overseer. I suppose we all come short in this service. It is nevertheless a very necessary service. I suppose the responsibility for the collapse of Ephesus lay somewhat on the overseers. Paul was very definite with them. He saw what could come in and he lays the weight of responsibility on them. Some persons have to accept responsibility in localities for, in a certain sense, the Lord leaves things in our hands. You may say, He is in control. He is, but He commits certain things to us and leaves them in our hands. The question is, are things prospering in our hands or is the enemy getting in? "I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears.

And now I commit you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give to you an inheritance among all the sanctified. I have coveted the silver or gold or clothing of no one".

What a servant Paul was; he coveted nothing, not even their admiration, not even a place of honour among them. Paul coveted nothing, but was committed to the welfare of these saints there for three years. Then, as I said before, he puts the whole weight on these overseers in Ephesus.

May the Lord help us in our households locally! May the Lord help every one of us who preaches or does anything on the principle of gift, and may there be overseers working, exercised amongst us for God's glory!

EDINBURGH

1 January 1975

BAPTISED FOR THE DEAD

E.C.Burr

1 Corinthians 15: 29

This chapter is one in which Paul's view of the position of the Christian is unfolded, from the time he first heard the gospel until the day of eternity. It does not in itself give us any indication of what the interval will be between the time when we heard the gospel, "in which also ye stand, by which also ye are saved" (vv 1,2), and the time when Christ will hand over the kingdom "to him who is God and Father " (v 24) "that God may be all in all" (v 28). The time when we first heard the gospel may perhaps have receded in our minds. No doubt most of us did not believe the gospel the first time we heard it, but there came a time when we did receive the glad tidings. Paul refers both to announcing the glad tidings and to making them known and I suppose, and indeed trust, that in so far as it is not true yet, the Lord would work in all here, so that each of us may have a definitive understanding that "Christ died for our sins... and that he was buried; and that he was raised" (vv 3,4), and then that, as ascended, He was seen. These things are basic to our Christianity, and Paul surveys things in the chapter right up to eternity, when God will be all in all. That will not be before eternity, I think it would be safe to say; though the assembly is viewed as being filled to all the fulness of God, it would not be accurate to say that God is all in all until eternity, that is that there is nothing which does not reflect God to Himself - a marvellous thing that is set before us, that the end of the operations of God, in which He designs to operate in us in the gospel, culminates in the time when He will be all in all - a profoundly long view. You might have thought, as you or I naturally would (and our thoughts are now conditioned by the length of time that has elapsed) that a long time would have elapsed between the preaching of the gospel and our entrance into eternity. If you look at other scriptures you discover that in Paul's mind the interval was never longer than the life of the person he was speaking to. He says to Timothy, "that thou keep the commandment spotless, irreproachable,

until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ", 1 Tim 6: 14. The clear inference from that is that Timothy could expect that the appearing would be in his own lifetime - "thou keep the commandment... until the appearing". If you think of the Thessalonians, Paul refers to their being found "blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ", 1 Thess 5: 23. A local assembly, as we have often said, of youthful formation but expectant that the coming of the Lord would be in the lifetime manifestly of the persons to whom it was said, because Paul is enjoining them to keep themselves spotless, so that they would be spotless at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

While this is the way in which Paul presents the unfolding of this the Spirit's day, we have experienced that much more time has unfolded. How many generations there have been since Paul 's word to Timothy! I suppose sixty or seventy since he wrote to Timothy and to the Thessalonians. While, therefore, on the one hand, each of us would carry in our souls the expectation that both the rapture would be in our lifetime, and then. the appearing of the Lord Jesus, (and we shall need to have this expectation reinforced in us, and it is well if ministry amongst us reinforces the coming of the Lord) we have also to be prepared for the continuance of things a little longer. What I am concerned about, beloved, is that each of us should be committed to the continuation of things on the basis on which the Lord would have us.

In 2 Timothy 2 Paul says to Timothy, "And the things thou hast heard of me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also" (v 2). It may be that we are right in interpreting that as Timothy committing things as passing them from one generation to another, but it is not necessarily so, and it would not be altogether consistent with Paul's manifest expectation that the Lord would appear within the lifetime of Timothy. It may be that what Paul had in mind was the diffusion horizontally of the truth that Timothy had received from him, that Timothy was to commit it to faithful men who would then spread it out to others also, rather than its continuing in a descendent line.

Nevertheless, whatever Paul had in mind, the truth has come down

to us in our own day in the line of that descent through faithful men who have been competent to instruct others also. It may be that at times we cannot always discover the faithful men. There is one Man who has always been faithful and that is Christ Himself. It says of God that He abides faithful and Christ abides faithful. There has always been one faithful Man, treasuring up the thoughts of God in His heart and in His mind, and ready to communicate them to others who would be competent to instruct others also. In His own time and way He has operated in unfolding the truth and in recovering the truth, so that what He gave through Paul, and through John and others, is available on the basis of being committed through competent hands to those who are able to instruct others. The testimony, therefore, comes down to our own day, a day in which in one sense things are as weak as they have ever been. Within you can feel the strength and the vitality of what the Lord has. I commend to the brethren a remark of Mr Stoney's in his letters. He refers to a letter which a brother had written to him and says, You perhaps used these words written without any preparation but I think they comprise the principles of a true position. The brother had said, A work of smaller dimensions on a firmer and sounder basis (JBS Letters NS Vol.1 p.22). Now, if that is true of our day, thank God for it. But if the work is of smaller dimensions but on a firmer and sounder basis let us be committed to building on that foundation which remains. "The firm foundation of God stands", 2 Tim 2: 19. And if the work appears to be of smaller dimensions, let us, beloved, ensure that we are committed to the work that remains and that we see that, in spite of the smallness; none of the ornamentation and provision that is in the divine mind is in any way given up. Let us be committed to the holding of the truth.

The Lord has, as I say, continued things down to our own day and in one way they are externally as weak as any one could find them. I expect there are plenty of people who would say that, if even a fox went up, it would knock it down. That is what they said in Nehemiah's day (see Neh 4: 3). I think we are committed to the fact that little foxes spoil the vines, but they are not going to be given the

access that would permit them to knock things over. The Lord would have us committed to the continuance of things; and one thing I feel the need of is to be maintained in the assurance that things will continue in the same way that the Lord has recovered them. There is always a danger as things pass from one generation to another that they become transformed as they pass. You find this in what goes on in other areas. I do not apply this to what goes on in the circle of the saints, but, for instance, if you look at government and those who are in government and then look at another younger generation who will one day be the government, you feel that as one generation gives way to another the nature of government will change. Now things are not to be in the assembly in that way.

Things are to be handed from one generation to another so that they are carried on in the way that the Lord recovered them to the preceding generation. While in spirit we would always maintain the truth in a way that is current in the day to which it is given, the Spirit is not concerned to change the substance of what has been recovered so as, for instance, to make it more fitting for a later day, that in which we ourselves live. The committal to the handing on of the truth in the way in which the Lord has given it to us is something to which we all should be devoting ourselves. It is important for the grandparent generation, and for the parental generation, to see that things are carried to the next generation in a way that does not in any way deny the substance of what the Lord has done so far.

Now I have alluded to this particular verse in 1 Corinthians 15 because one thing we can be sure of is that the Spirit does not use words carelessly, and Paul under the direction of the Spirit does not use words at random or aimlessly. If Paul uses a word by the Spirit he uses the word that is intended for the purpose, and what I want to draw attention to is that Paul does not say, for instance, those that come into the assembly and make up the number in place of the dead. He is contemplating, as we can see, that saints die. They depart to be with Christ which, he says elsewhere, is very much better. They are sown as he says in this chapter, in corruption, in weakness in dishonour and so on. Paul does not just say that he is

concerned as to those that will make up the number of those who die. We are thankful for numbers, we are thankful for those that the Lord is recovering to the truth in the present day. Paul does not just say, those who will believe the gospel in place of those who have died. What he says is "the baptised for the dead". Now I venture to suggest to the brethren that that is the key to the handing on of things from one generation to another, that the next generation apprehends what it is to be baptised for the dead. Baptised - not converted or coming into fellowship, although that will follow, but *baptised* for the dead. He says If Christ is not raised and the dead are not raised, then why are they baptised for them? He does not say, Why do they believe the gospel? but, Why are they baptised? I think this has much to say to us even at the present day. Whether we apprehend that our own place in the testimony at the present time is related to having been baptised for the dead.

Now baptism has two particular aspects - an external aspect and an inward aspect. I think that the external aspect is that which we have to understand first. It may sound trite to say that and the more so because we have been brought up against the background of having been baptised as infants. (We trust we are brought up in the light of that fact that we were baptised as infants and we are then in an atmosphere where the doctrine and the truth as to baptism is unfolded to us). But I think there is less apprehension amongst us of what baptism means in the public sense than there was, for instance, with the believers in the beginning of the Acts where persons were baptised many years before the doctrine of baptism was unfolded. I feel convicted of the necessity for the reality of baptism in the public sense to be borne in upon us and ourselves to be committed to it if the recovery that the Lord has worked in is to be continued in men and women who will be faithful to it. It is easy to see, if you go back to the beginning of the Acts, that the bearing of baptism publicly was something that was resolutely taken on, something that was clearly, definitively known and something that could not be gone back on. I wonder how many of us actually apprehend that our committal to Christ is of that quality. The

tendency with ourselves is to allow ourselves to be drawn back into the world out of which we have been baptised, and its influences are continuous. They are continuous on young people, but they are continuous on people like me, and on old people. The drawing back of the world is a continuous activity of the prince and god of the world. If you went back to the beginning of the Acts you would understand that you were there in a world in which the Lord Jesus had been publicly crucified only a few weeks earlier, and the effect of baptism as you committed yourself to it would be that plainly and irrevocably you had committed yourself to the testimony of the Man that the world had crucified.

Now, beloved brethren, we are here known, or we used to be known, by the world as persons who were committed to a rejected Christ. Are we still so now? Are we known more as persons who hold exclusive doctrines (and exclusivism is right in itself, the exclusion of evil is a thing that no Christian rightly instructed could deny) or are we actually known as persons who are committed to a rejected Christ? Suppose you had lived in Jerusalem and were amongst those who in Acts 2 accepted what Peter said and had been baptised; every one would know that you were a person who was devoted to the Man that had been rejected and that you counted all things loss for the excellency of His knowledge.

Now, beloved, if the testimony is to be continued on the basis of persons being baptised for the dead, that groundwork in every person who wanted to be committed to the testimony is inescapable. There is no continuance of the testimony as it has been recovered unless the reality of baptism in its public sense is not only apprehended objectively but is the definitive commitment of every one of us. As I say, Paul does not use these words lightly and, if he says *baptised* for the dead, it involves that our public position is that we are committed to a rejected Christ. You can easily see from this that matters of association and social links and worldly conduct fall into their place. If they do not, take a rejected Christ into them and see how the things stand up, If you are associated in something, take a rejected Christ there and see whether they will have Him arid,

if they will not have Him, remember that you are baptised to the name of the Lord Jesus. Which are you going to have? Are you going to have the association or the Christ? Which will you have? If you are drawn into social links with persons who are in the world, persons who say, Come With us, as they do in Proverbs 1. let us have one purse, let us enjoy ourselves, take a rejected Christ there and see how He fits in. We need to look at the whole range of links which we allow ourselves to form socially in the light of the fact that we are amongst those that are baptised for the dead, not amongst merely believers On the Lord Jesus. Thank God we are that. We are not merely amongst those who have a particular doctrinal or church position, we are among the baptised for the dead. That is something that is distinguished from just believing on the Lord Jesus. You are in the world at the present time as a person who has been baptised and, if you can take a rejected Christ somewhere, go. If you can join *Him* to something, join Him to it. If you cannot, do neither. If you are drawn into worldly behaviour, worldly customs, consider whether they suit Him. There are a lot of worldly customs: marriages seem to be an occasion for the demonstration of worldly customs. Beloved, a marriage between two persons who are among the baptised for the dead has all the joy of a marriage, but it has an underlying solemnity, because here are two persons committing themselves to another household in which that rejected Man is to have the prime place. Let these things affect us. Let us know that we are not in the world merely as believers on the Lord Jesus. We are that, and thank God for the work that has given us that faith in Him, but we are here as persons who are baptised. Remember it, and if you forget what it feels like, put yourself back in your mind into Acts 2 and think of a world of which the whole city was characteristically murderous and you said, I will stand with the Man who was murdered. That is the public position of the testimony, that is what being baptised involves.

One hardly needs to refer to 2 Timothy 2 if baptism and its significance publicly is really grasped in the soul and, therefore, I say that if the testimony is to be continued in the way the Lord recovered

it (not in the way that men have handled it and what men have made of it) it must be in persons who know what it is to have been baptised in its public sense. We have had a lot of history that has been very sorrowful. I suppose none of us who thinks about it and has had any prominent part in it, ever thinks of it without some feeling of self-consciousness and guilt, although the Lord in His grace has dealt with all that. Thank God He has, and it has left men free to go on with the Lord. Let us remember that it is not the history of recovery as man has made it but what the Lord would have, and it requires the present bearing of baptism on every one of us, that is, I am defined in the world, not just as a good converted man. Mr Stoney would never have the expression, a Christian man. He says if you want to speak about a Christian, speak about a Christian, but a Christian man is seeking to add something to what a man is himself. Let us remember that the continuance of the testimony, in the way Paul alludes to it here, depends on persons being thoroughly committed to the fact that Christ has been rejected by the world and we, therefore, with Him.

It has also its bearing inwardly, perhaps easier to speak about than it is to produce in testimony. In one sense the public aspect of Christianity is easier than the inward aspect because, to use an illustration, I may be invited to go somewhere and I say, I will not go and that is that. But inwardly, if I allow something of the old man, in a moment it doubles, in a moment it quadruples, then it is up to eight and in a few moments you are filled, perhaps for a moment, with some malicious spirit that is an unbaptised condition. Envy is perhaps something that we judge less easily, the desire that what somebody else has might be mine, the place, the readiness, the spirit of being ready to speak; and so on; I may envy all these things. But there are other aspects of what is inward and natural to which baptism has to refer. Such things as natural sentiment and a feeling that it would not be nice to do so and so, sometimes even the feeling of Peter in relation to the Lord who was going on to death: "This shall in no wise be unto thee" Matt 16: 22. It sometimes works out that the allowance of this kind of thing prevents matters being

dealt with in our assemblies that ought to be dealt with, because there is some consideration based on feelings that went into the grave with Christ Himself. "As many as have been baptised unto Christ, have put on Christ", Gal 3: 27. But what went into His grave with Him was every feeling and emotion which cannot find a foundation in His death and His present life, and the remarks of Peter to the Lord which I quoted too often find an echo in us, that we would rather not touch or deal with something because of whom it will offend or whom it will upset or what the consequences will be.

That is not the basis on which the testimony will be continued in those who have been baptised for the dead. They are able to rally themselves in relation to the fact that they have experimentally proved what it was for these things to go into Christ's grave with Him, and they come out in newness of life with none of these old things clinging to them, none of them having an operative part in their present activities of whatever kind they may be. So Paul would have us learn that the old man and his deeds lie there, they lie in Christ's grave where He has been for us, as delineating for us what baptism involves. There is circumcision, which has much the same effect in its private bearing, but baptism has necessarily a public bearing. It has a bearing on us in relation to these less tangible things that I speak of, and which are essential to be judged as having been dealt with in Christ's death, if the testimony is to be continued in the way it has been handed down to us.

I have referred to these things, beloved, because I feel that Paul does not use the words carelessly. He does not use them merely as a kind of synonym for something else. When Paul says "baptised for the dead" he means "baptised for the dead", and he means the full bearing of baptism to be working in us. I believe that, if we wish, as surely we do, the testimony to be continued in the way it has come down to us in the Lord's grace and in spite of much failure on the part of men, and most notably on the part of ourselves, we must apprehend the reality of baptism in its full significance in judging what is unsuitable to Christ. It helps us also in putting His things first; but Paul looks for the testimony to be continued, not

merely in believers, not merely in those who have the gain of Christ's death, not merely in those who are hoping to go to heaven when they die. Persons who have relegated their Christian history to going to heaven when they die are pretty well useless as far as the present testimony is concerned; they postpone everything and will have the world for the present time. What Paul is looking for, if the testimony is to be continued, are persons who have apprehended baptism.

The teaching of baptism is very well known amongst us. There are many persons here who could speak about it far better than I could. One thing that impresses me often is the way in which the generations preceding my own, my father's generation and my grandfather's generation, could speak about these things as the common currency of their language. You hardly ever went to a meeting without hearing something that had an inward effect on you being spoken about by men who appeared to be familiar with it. That is perhaps something that we have in a diminished way at the present time, and it may be that as individuals we have not committed ourselves thoroughly enough to the substance of the truth which brethren two generations ago actively and freely entered into in intercourse with one another and which affected everything that they did. Many things belonged to that generation which one does not hear now. You heard brothers who could speak about the types of the tabernacle as if they were meat and drink to them. They lived them, they talked them, they could unfold them. It is easy to say that the day when that kind of thing was needed is past. We may think it is past because we are not competent to maintain it. Beloved, we can always improve our competency in the truth. There is one thing that the Lord would impress upon us, and I feel this very much as I look at the next generation here today. Thank God for all the children here; may they be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But I would encourage parents to keep their children in their own house as long as they can; brethren should not allow their children to go to school before their time. Do not send your children out of your own care before you have to. I feel it is almost a betrayal of the young children if they are sent into the world before they have

to be. But bring them up, look at them. Do you have confidence that the things that you received from your father will be manifested in these children in twenty years time? If you do, beloved, then I have confidence that the testimony will continue. But I feel that there may be a need for our reinforcing one another in some of the more fundamental aspects of the truth, both in its public and its private bearing, if the Lord is going to have, if He leaves us here for another generation, persons in it who are worthy of the fulness of the light He has given.

Well, beloved, let us encourage one another. I would never like to minister in a way that brought depression or anxiety to the brethren, but if we have our eye on the things that matter most, the Lord will help us in committal to them. And if we anticipate, as we some times do, that the Lord may leave things here for a little bit longer, let us be sure that we are setting an example in our own generation, and nurturing in the next, the attitude of being baptised for the dead, which is the security, I think, of things continuing until the appearing. May the Lord help us.

PETERHEAD

8 March 1975

SOME FUNDAMENTALS -

THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF CHRIST

Quite early in His pathway the Lord had indicated that He would ascend up where He was before. The disciples had experienced the sorrow of their Lord's rejection and crucifixion, and they knew where He had been buried, but had known the joy of receiving the wonderful news of His glorious resurrection. They had, too, His message, "I ascend to my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God", John 20: 17. During a period of forty days He assembled with them speaking of the things relating to the kingdom of God. But still the disciples did not understand His current movements and Jesus made it clear that the time for restoring the kingdom to Israel must be left in the Father's hands. He had previously told them He would go away to His Father and their favoured part was to be His witnesses during His absence in the very scene of His rejection and crucifixion. For this purpose they would be empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit not many days hence (see Acts 1: 1-11). Then He lifted up His hands and blessed them, and while He was blessing them He was carried up into heaven, a cloud receiving Him out of their sight (see Luke 24: 50-53). We can well understand how intently they watched that cloud, but two men in white clothing stood by them and said, "Men of Galilee, why do ye stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven shall thus come in- the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven", Acts 1: 11.

The world had rejected Him but the heavens received Him. Our knowledge of what took place when Jesus was received up into heaven is very limited, but we know He was "received up in glory", 1 Tim 3: 16. Because of His path of moral worth, God "highly exalted him and granted him a name, that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow", Phil 2: 9. In a coming day it will be said, "Lift up your heads, ye gates... and the King of glory shall come in", Ps 24: 7. How much greater the acclamations must have been in the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit

over the great work of redemption accomplished so gloriously by the Son! God's delight in the exaltation of Christ is emphasised by the quotation five times in the New Testament of David's words, "Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet", Ps 110: 1.

So now, by faith and in the power of the Spirit, we see Jesus, who was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour. It is a great moment for the believer when for the first time he gets the impression in his soul that Jesus is a real living Man at the right hand of God. Henceforward the Lord Jesus will become the centre and object of his affections and govern his life and ways here. As this outlook is maintained he will grow in his appreciation of the fact that the One who descended to the lowest depths is the same who has also ascended above all the heavens that He might fill all things.

W.E.Ellis

THE CHILDREN'S NAMES

Most names that children are given have a meaning which, in many cases, comes from a language other than their own. The persons in the Old Testament whom we feel we know best were named from events at their birth or from some expectation of what their history would be. All these details have lessons for us for whom the Scriptures were written.

The names of the first two children to be born are well known. Cain means much the same as our word 'gain', whereas Abel means a mere 'breath'. It is quite likely that they were twins but in any case they both had the same parental care and the same teaching about their Creator. When grown-up however the first, with the more high-sounding name, thought that God would accept him because of what he could himself do. But Abel by faith - which comes by paying attention to God's word - brought from the flock a more excellent sacrifice. Therefore he was accepted, as we say of believers now, in the worth of Christ and His work of atonement.

When Solomon was born God sent a special messenger with a new name meaning that the child was "Beloved of Jehovah". This shows how God has longings for the very youngest. Although the name was not apparently used it must have been a wonderful secret as the child grew up! A baptised child also has a wonder, a secret - that his or her name has been need in the same sentence as the great revealed name of God who looks for an answer to His intense longings

In the New Testament the only names recorded at birth are those of the Lord Jesus and of John who was to be His forerunner. The latter name tells us something *about* God, being a short form of a word meaning 'God is gracious'. But Jesus *was* God Himself come into human infancy and at once named as a Saviour. How the heavenly host must have rejoiced when they said "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men". It seems that angels do not sing but it is the privilege of every child to sing the

praises of the Lord. Do you rejoice to do this or must the stones themselves cry out?

J.C.Evershed