

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 38

May 1976

Contents

SALVATION IN NONE OTHER

GOD OPERATING IN A SECRET WAY

GLAD TIDINGS TO THE POOR

THE CHILDREN'S TASTING

SALVATION IN NONE OTHER

C.S.Elliott

Acts 4: 5-12

In this passage the Spirit of God uses the occasion to point out the uniqueness of Christ. At that time in Jerusalem Peter said "Salvation is in none other" and we are thankful to God that this is still true. Persons can still be saved as they come to Jesus. It is a great thing that salvation is in none other. The Lord Jesus is such a worthy Person that you can understand something of the delight of the Father 's heart in placing all things in His hands. We sometimes sing: 'God has full delight in Jesus... All shall prosper in His hand'. That can be said of no other man, no matter how great he is. At times we put a great deal of confidence in persons, but later disappointment comes in. The Lord Jesus is "the same yesterday, and today, and to the ages to come", Heb 13: 8. That is a great thing - to find One who is the Same. He is so approachable, always the Same. It does not take much to change us, but He remains the Same. That is the Lord Jesus, the Saviour of the world. We need someone like that. Do you have Him? If you have Him lay hold on Him! He is precious "the chiefest among ten thousand", Song of Sol 5: 10. The first place belongs to Him.

So here the apostle says "Salvation is in none other". Think of the myriads of men who have lived on the face of this earth, great persons able to effect something; great doctors able to perform cures; great statesmen able to do great things; but great as they are, scripture says "Salvation is in none other". If we are to be saved we must come to Jesus, God's wellbeloved Son. Think of what it means! Every person on the face of this earth who wants to be saved must come to Jesus. Scripture says "Go to Joseph", Gen 41: 55. There was a time in Egypt when anyone who wanted food had to go to Joseph. If you were filled with pride and stayed away you would have starved to death. Many persons are like that. They know where help is but they stay in their pride and die in their sins. Thank God that the Lord Jesus has come in and we have known

Him. He is the only One; no other name is given, "for neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved". What are you going to do? Are you going to die in your sins? Is there anyone here who is going to die in his sins? Think how tragic it will be if you are not saved! Where will you spend eternity? With the devil and his angels? In the lake of fire? It is a real matter. Are you going to spend eternity there? Or are you going to spend eternity with Christ, which is far better?

So the apostle, just to settle any questions which might have arisen, said that it was the same Jesus. "Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaraean, whom ye have crucified..." How he laid it on their consciences! *You* have crucified the Just One! The word of God has a way of getting at our consciences. I might say many things and they do not reach you, but sometimes the right scripture comes in and brings conviction. It is the word of God. So here the word is bringing in conviction. He says that it is the same Jesus that *you* have crucified. That was meant to unsettle them. If something in the word unsettles you and turns you to Jesus it is wonderful, because that is where your faith ought to be - in Jesus, a living glorified Man. So here he says "in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaraean, whom ye have crucified, whom God has raised from among the dead, by him this man stands here before you sound in body". What a great thing it was to see that man, who had been there begging, sound in body; and I would believe sound in mind also, for when the Lord works a cure He cures the whole man. Physicians might be able to cure me physically but it does not mean they will be able to reach my mind. When the Lord Jesus effects a cure, He reaches the entire being. The Lord Jesus is intent on getting the whole man for Himself. So here it is in that Name, the Name of love. We sometimes sing 'There is a Name we love to hear, We love to sing its worth' (hymn 455). Do you love to hear that Name? The Father takes delight in directing attention to Him - "My beloved Son". 'Thy name must live, whatever names may die'. His Name must live. Are you vitally connected with that Person? That Name is going through;

it must go through. There is no other Name under heaven by which we must be saved. Then, if you believe on the Lord Jesus, He is coming to take you for Himself. In the meantime He is helping you here, keeping you, maintaining you in the time of His absence. The Spirit is here energising you, focussing your attention on Christ until He Himself comes. "The Lord himself", 1 Thess 4: 16! He does not leave it to an angel to come and take you to be with Himself. Scripture says that we shall not all die but we shall all be changed. There was a time in the history of the Corinthians when the apostle Paul said that: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all fall asleep, but we shall all be changed, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye... the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible", 1 Cor 15: 51, 52. In the meantime we go through a lot of exercises, and there is that in us which the Lord has to break down. The Spirit of God has to break us down, work on us, soften us, mould us in the way the Lord wants, but in the end He is going to have His finished product. At the end of Jacob's life he could say, "the God that shepherded me all my life long to this day" (Gen 48: 15), and he finishes as a worshipper God puts us through varied experiences with a view to getting us the way He wants. So the Lord Himself will come to take us to be with Himself. What a time it will be!

Meantime how glorious it is to have to do with this Person! He is the greatest Person in the universe. Do you know any other person as great as the Lord Jesus? You cannot find one. In Him there is perfection, excellence, manhood according to God. All the features delightful to heaven are concentrated in this glorious Person. It is little wonder that the voice could exclaim "*This* is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: hear him", Matt 17: 5. How worthy the Lord Jesus is to be heard! How worthy He is of our affection! He is the One who loved us so much that He bore all the bitterness, all the ignominy and shame that was due to us because of sin; the Lord Jesus bore it all. In my righteousness and in yours we could not stand before God. Scripture says, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags", Isa 64: 6. Think of such a

description! That is what your righteousnesses and mine are in the eye of a holy God - filthy rags! But then there is One who is great enough to take our liabilities upon Himself. The hymn writer says, 'Himself He could not save, He on the cross must die' (no 240). How great it was that the Lord Jesus did that for you and for me! He died that we might live. We are not using empty words; it actually happened. We could not stand before the eye of a holy God. We are born in sin, shapen in iniquity: the Lord Jesus took all that upon Himself. He bore it all in His body on the tree. He did it because He loves you, and me. He did not hold Himself back but went the whole way; as the hymn states, 'That bitter cup - love drank it up' (no 415). And now what? Blessing! The apostle can say, "The cup of blessing which we bless", 1 Cor 10: 16. Do you find blessing coming into your soul as you have to do with Jesus? The bitter cup is gone and now there is blessing for you and me as we have to do with God.

"He is the stone which has been set at nought by you the builders, which is become the corner stone". Are you building without Jesus? If you are building, make sure that the Lord Jesus is the corner stone. We read of a building built on sand, and it says that its fall was great (see Matt 7: 27). We have seen tremendous crashes in our time and they will continue to occur. If the building is not built on Christ, and He is not the corner stone, it is sure to collapse, and great will be the fall of it. We do not want that to happen in our lives. We want to be those who are building with Jesus as the corner stone. It says "Unless Jehovah build the house, in vain do its builders labour in it", Ps 127: 1. Make sure the building has this corner stone. And if it is founded on Christ the corner stone the whole building takes proper proportion for the pleasure of God. So Peter says "He is the stone which has been set at nought by you the builders, which is become the corner stone". He is God's corner stone, everything for God is centred in Him. Are we going to make more room for Him so that He becomes increasingly precious to our hearts? It is wonderful to have some regard for what is for the heart of God. It is man's whole purpose here that he should be living in relation to his Creator. His whole being should be in that direction.

But when we look around what we see very sadly is the power that the enemy has on the souls of men. It is a great power. Think of the myriads of people alive at this time, and think how few really have a regard for Christ. I say that guardedly; the Lord knows. Persons are rushing along the road to destruction. The newspapers are full of calamities. Persons who have to do with Jesus are steering another course, but many are going their own way without regard to Christ. It makes us feel the power the enemy has. He is like a roaring lion (see 1 Pet 5: 8). He has been active for centuries, turning the souls of men and women away from God. And he is still doing it. He will continue until his time expires. What we have to see in the meantime is that he has power and he is using that power to the maximum to turn away the souls of men and women from God. But then we thank God that there are those who have a conscious sense of coming to Jesus and being sheltered by the blood, in order that they might live. He is "ascended up above all the heavens" Eph 4: 10. Acts 3: 21 says "whom heaven indeed must receive". That is the Lord Jesus. What excellency in Him, the Lord Jesus! How unique He is! How excellent, the chiefest among ten thousand, the chiefest One to our hearts! Do we find Him so? Is He still chief to our hearts? Is He still being accorded the first place? If that is so it is glorious; and may it be more so, for His heart's pleasure and delight.

PLAINFIELD NJ

28 December 1975

GOD OPERATING IN A SECRET WAY

J.Spinks

1 Samuel 1: 9-11; 2: 18,19,21 (last sentence), 26; 3: 19,20; Judges 16: 20-22, 25-30

I would like to say something, with the Lord's help, about what God is doing in a secret way. In these scriptures the enemy apparently has the upper hand. The first scripture in Samuel shows how departure had come in among the people of God. Those who ostensibly were protectors of the ark were acting in a corrupt way, away that was displeasing to Jehovah. God was taking account of it. It says of the sons of Eli that "the sin of the young men was very great before Jehovah, for men despised the offering of Jehovah", 1 Sam 2: 7. This really depicts, I believe, what has taken place in

Christendom, that persons who set themselves up as leaders of God's people have taken the most precious things and made them common, and have brought in what is blasphemous in character. The sons of Eli were taking the offerings and using them for themselves. How God felt that! The preciousness of Christ, the fat of the offerings and their fat, things that spoke to God of Christ, these men were appropriating to themselves. Things were in a very low state in Israel. Surely it would be like the present day when things outwardly have degenerated to a very low state. We would not exclude ourselves from it; we are all responsible for the public failure of the assembly. But what impressed me, dear brethren, is that God works. In spite of man's failure, God is operating in a secret way and He is operating today. I would to God that all of us might get our eyes opened to see that God is operating and that He is operating with us individually.

In this first chapter we have Hannah, a woman of no special standing in Israel but a woman who felt the conditions that prevailed among God's people, who felt the deterioration of the priesthood as seen in Eli, a man who in some sense knew what was right but was powerless to bring in the answer, powerless to stand against what his sons were doing. What a condition of things is depicted in this book! What a condition of things there is around us, dear brethren! The Spirit of God would help us to feel things in a far deeper way than we do. In the first chapter of Genesis it says that "the Spirit of

God was hovering over the face of the waters" (v 2). I think it shows something of divine feelings. How the Spirit of God has felt what has come in through sin! Think of how He feels the present condition when men are turning aside from all that has been brought in through Christianity, taking all the benefits that accrue from a Christian country yet despising God and turning aside from all that God has brought in. God feels it and we are meant to feel it. A believer is meant to feel these things in a very deep way. Men feel it in some measure. Men deplore the depravity of men, all that has come in in the way of corruption. I do not believe there has been a time in the history of the world, certainly not in the history of the western world, when there has been so much depravity and corruption increasing at such a speed that no one can stop it. God feels these things and we are meant to feel them, dear brethren.

God is working in Hannah. It says "Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk... and she was in bitterness of soul". Here is a woman who felt the condition of things, who felt as God felt in some measure. We should feel things as God feels them. A priest does that. A priest thinks for God and, I would say, a priest feels for God. We need to develop in these priestly feelings. I feel for myself how shallow I am. Maybe we all feel that, how shallow we are; but the Lord and the Spirit would promote depth with us, this feeling side of things that would be with God in what He is doing, that would feel for God in the conditions that prevail at the present time. So she asks for a man child. Is it for herself? No, it is for God. She has an outlook towards the testimony. She feels what has come in; she sees the need for a man child. Oh, the need for men, the need for a man child, this element that will take up responsibility and hold things for God when what is public has so deeply and grievously failed. Hannah says "if thou... wilt give unto thy handmaid a man child, then I will give him to Jehovah all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head". God granted this wish, He granted Hannah a man child. What I wish to stress is that there was something here that was really the answer to all that had come in. Think how God is working in this way. The

position publicly seems hopeless, the priesthood failed and corrupt, bringing disrepute on the whole system; but God was working through the feelings of this woman, bringing in the man child, something that is growing. There is something wonderful about what God can do in a secret way. The enemy is doing things; he appears to have the upper hand, leading men in the path of lawlessness and disrespect of every human institution that God has brought in. The mystery of lawlessness is working. But there is something else working. It is a wonderful thing to see that God is working. As the scripture says: "I work a work in your days", Hab 1: 5. What God is doing in the present day through persons who have feelings akin to His, who are concerned for the continuation of the testimony, persons that are desirous that something will come in that will be for God!

"Samuel ministered before Jehovah, a boy girded with a linen ephod. And his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year". Growth was there, it was a testimony to the growth of the boy. How delightful this was to God, the boy growing up! Seemingly nothing was outwardly happening in the whole system; the ark was being neglected (as we know it was taken into captivity in these chapters); but there was something there that was growing. Oh, dear brethren, let us be concerned to be growing. We may feel small in our apprehension of divine things (it surely is small), but we can always grow, we can always take on features of Christ. Think of that coat as Hannah brought it each year, and it fitted. There was some increase. How delightful it was to the eye of God! Here was something growing, something that was going to make its mark in Israel; in that we can presume to make much of a mark outwardly in Christendom, but God takes account of what there is of Christ, what there is of the subjective work of the Spirit. So a man is needed for testimony. That is what Paul has to say to the Corinthians, when things were at a low ebb and when the responsible side was neglecting what was laid upon them; he says "quit yourselves like men; be strong", 1 Cor 16: 13. What is needed in our localities is not only the feeling side that Hannah depicts but

the side of manhood, the side that will take up things for God. Samuel is growing, and soon men take account of it: "the boy Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with Jehovah and also with men". Let us covet to grow in this way so that it becomes evident that God is with us; growing in the knowledge of God and growing in a sphere of influence among the brethren too. Manhood is required in these days, manhood that will take up the things of God and hold them. "Hold fast what thou hast" is the word to Philadelphia, that no one take thy crown", Rev 3: 11. Thank God for the way the Lord has brought us through sovereign mercy into a position where we have a sense of the lord's approval. Let us hold fast what we have. It is no time for complacency, dear brethren, no time for holding back. It is a question of holding fast what we have. Manhood is required for it. To be an overcomer at the end requires manhood, because there is so much to distract. The enemy knows our weaknesses, what to bring forward to lead us astray; but manhood, according to God will hold fast what we have. What it is to hold a position inviolate to Christ! How soon the Lord's coming will be! What it will be to Him to find persons who are holding fast what they have. Think of the ministries of the recovery, dear brethren. Let us value them, go over what we have. Have we appropriated them for ourselves? Let us hold fast to these divine principles that have come down to us at such a cost "that no one take thy crown.

So "Samuel grew, and Jehovah was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground". I think it has been said that his words would find an entrance into the hearts of those who were prepared. We need to acquire power in our local settings, not to make much of ourselves, but we need to be with God to see that we are acquiring this power with God, this priestly side that Hannah would depict, and the responsible side depicted in Samuel. He was established a prophet; that is what is needed in these days, prophetic speaking, the word of God coming in to help us and to preserve us in our local places." By a prophet Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved", Hos 12: 13. I just mention this to encourage us all to take up things for God; on the one hand to

develop feelings, induced by the Holy Spirit, that would feel the conditions that have come in in the way that God feels them, and on the other to be able to bring in the answer as in Samuel that can hold things for God.

I read in Judges because this again shows us a picture of how the enemy apparently gets the upper hand. Samson is overcome by Delilah. It says he "thought, I will go out as at other times before, and disengage myself". He was insensitive to what was happening. We can be like that, insensitive to an overpowering influence. We have to examine our own hearts as to what it is, what can come in and overpower us so that our strength for God is failing. This insensitive side has to be watched, for we can be gradually losing our power. The enemy can bring in something that overpowers us, so that where once we were bright, gradually there is a diminishing. Gradually we may find that we are praying less, giving less time to divine things, that we are insensitive to the enemy gradually overpowering us. We have to see that we are on the alert at all times, maintaining things by the Spirit, because at best we are weak. The flesh is weak and the enemy knows how to take advantage of that. The position here is a very pathetic one, referring again to what has transpired in Christendom; indeed we would bring it closer home, what has transpired amongst us. Oh, the humiliation of this position; but have we not contributed to the public humiliation? The Lord would have us to feel things. There was one who gave "great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme", 2 Sam 12: 14. Well, we have contributed to it all. But what brought me to this scripture was that "the hair of his head began to grow after he was shaved". The enemy would not notice this. These men thought that Samson was finished but there was something there almost indiscernible, the Spirit of God working, the hair of his head growing. The enemy can take account of a lot but there is something that he cannot take account of. When a man feels things before God, when self-judgment is working, when the Spirit is finding a basis through self-judgment to bring in something, it is like God operating in a secret way. "The hair of his head began to grow after he was

shaved". It is a wonderful thing that through self-judgment we can give room for the Spirit to operate. It is only through self-judgment on our part that the Spirit can find a basis to operate and bring in moral power. "They called Samson out of the prison-house, and he played before them; and they set him between the pillars". What a picture of abject humiliation! A man who had been used of the Lord in a marked way, who had been used to free the people from the bondage of the Philistines, was now an object of humiliation. That is what the position has become publicly, but thank God there are the inward, secret workings of the Spirit of God. Thank God He has an entrance into our hearts through the work of God that is there. I do not think we value enough, dear brethren, the fact that God has deigned to work in us. The work of God is a wonderful thing, that God has come into persons like you and me, weak, mortal men and women, persons who have known what it is to be under the domination of sin, and He has operated in His own way and has worked a work that has led us in repentance to Christ, and then given us the Holy Spirit so that there is formation in a scene where formerly we were under the bondage of Satan. Here it says "Samson said to the lad that held him by the hand, Let loose of me". I think there would be something in that too: "Let loose of me". You may say it is a lad, it is not much. But Samson says "Let loose of me". However small it may be, the Lord would have us dispense with it, because it will only hold us here, hold us in bondage to a system that has rejected Christ. He is led to the pillars upon which the house stands. We think of what supports the whole world system: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life – the whole world system is supported on these principles. But when the Spirit of God operates we find other principles working within us, the principle of obedience, the principle of subjection to Christ. These things are foreign to us naturally but God operates in such a way that through this we can overcome the whole world system. Here Samson rises to a type of Christ, One who slew in His death more than ever He had slain in His life. What a type of Christ he is! the One who brought down the Philistine system and did more in His death than in His life, speaking reverently. I think Samson is also a

type of the believer. As the Spirit of God has room to operate with him he can be used to bring down the whole world system. What a thing it is that God can operate in young believers in such a way that the world system is brought down in their lives; not only in their hearts, but in their lives, meaning that we are walking here as those who are not of the world, who do not draw from it, who are not in any sense tied up with all that is in the world, all these terrible principles which God is soon going to have to say to in judgment. Let us see that we live by the principles that the Spirit of God sets on in us. Think of these wonderful features of Christ, and such as you and I can display these features. It is a wonderful triumph of divine grace.

I remember a servant of the Lord saying that a subdued saint is a testimony to Christ's power to fill the universe. If He can do it with one man He can do it with a whole universe. He is going to do it in a very-soon-coming day. Everything is going to be headed up in Christ. Those who have rejected Him will have to come and do homage: "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow", Phil 2: 10. Let us see that our knees are bowing increasingly, dear brethren, that He is having a greater place with us; that the Spirit of God is given room to work. In Genesis 24 the word was "room to lodge" (v 25). Give the Spirit room to lodge and surely He will work out these subjective features which will bring down the world system. May we have our eyes opened to see what God is doing in these days ("I work a work in your days" He says) and see to it that we are giving the Spirit of God room to work in us, for the glory of God. May the Lord help us in it for His Name's sake.

GRANGEMOUTH

21 September 1974

GLAD TIDINGS TO THE POOR

E.C.Burr

Matthew 11: 1-6

This section brings out a description from Jesus Himself of the work that He was doing. At this particular point in His service here John sends enquiringly from the prison to hear whether He was the Christ or were they to wait for another. What Jesus says, as will readily be noticed, reflects what He had read from Isaiah in Luke 4 as to the nature of His service. In Luke 4 He went into the synagogue and received the roll of the book and unrolled it until He came to the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor" (v 18), and as He went on through those verses He came again to the question of the preaching: "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord". Here the first things that He speaks of as to the blind and the lepers and the deaf and the dead have in one sense all passed. James helps us to understand that these things, save for the raising of the dead, are not wholly to be excluded in the present time. "The prayer of faith shall heal the sick" he says (chap 5: 15), and there are cases known to be extant in which it is claimed, as a result of prayer and even of the laying on of hands, that specific cases of healing have taken place. That epistle would lead us not to deny that it may be possible for the blind to see and the deaf to hear and lepers to be cleansed. In this present day of advanced medicine lepers are not easily cleansed, but James would allow that those things may happen. The dead are not being raised at the present time, the day will come for that; the gospel has a lot to say about the day when the dead will be raised. But one thing does remain: the poor have the gospel preached to them; that remains. I would like to say, beloved, let it remain, let the poor have the gospel preached to them. This time on the Lord's day is announced for the preaching of the word of God but the special character of the word of God that enters into this time is the preaching of the gospel.

I read the first verse of the chapter because it distinguishes between teaching and preaching; it says, "when Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and preach in their cities". There are perhaps few occasions in which we feel more that we have been taught than when the reality of the gospel has been announced to us and it has effected something fresh in our souls. So teaching enters into this time, but what the time is characterised by is that poor have glad tidings announced to them. The very words that Jesus uses here suggest as He speaks of the poor - no doubt speaking immediately of people who had not much in this world's resources - the idea that they were people in need. You do not customarily speak of the rich as implying need, although in relation to the preaching of the gospel there is no distinction of rich and poor, both are presented in regard to the preaching of the gospel as in need, and that is the direction Jesus points to in regard to the preaching - that the poor have glad tidings announced to them. Think how much it must have mattered to Him to send this word to John. You might have thought that it would be sufficient to have spoken about the blind and the deaf and the lepers and the dead; after all there was an enormous public testimony in that. If a man is in prison (and sympathetic as we may feel in regard to John, he is questioning, almost wondering what his life of service has been about) what message would you send him? Well, you would say people are having their eyes opened and lepers are being cleansed and deaf are hearing and dead being raised. Will not all this confirm you John? But Jesus says "and poor have glad tidings preached to them". It seems to me that He adds that for a purpose, drawing our attention to the fact that there are persons who can be spoken of in one sense or another as poor, people in need, people who need their deficiency to be made up from outside themselves, people who will be thankful if their need is met. Therefore one is impressed that it is essential in the preaching that the case of men and women as they are is taken up and the glad tidings that meet their state ministered to them. One hears occasionally at the preaching references to what are spoken of as 'the facts of the gospel' as if the preacher perhaps ought to mention them,

whatever he may mean by that expression, and then get on with the preaching. But the very purpose of this meeting relates to what is assimilated in that expression 'the facts of the gospel'. It is not so much for the development of advanced truth or for teaching but to meet the needs of the poor, to meet the need of souls, to meet the need of people who are without God and without hope in the world; it is for that purpose. It is to meet the need of persons who in the day when God finally makes a reckoning with them will have either to show that they have absolutely nothing and therefore they are condemned by God because they are before Him with no refuge in respect of themselves or their sins, or on the other hand who will be able to say with confidence that they know they are perfectly secure.

The necessity of preaching the gospel to the unconverted would strike us all, but there is also the necessity of maintaining the preaching of the gospel to the saints, to those who have believed it for years, to those to whom it may be even more real than it is to the preacher; the essentiality of preaching the gospel remains to the present day. As I said, out of the things that Jesus sends a message about to John, as far as ordinary experience goes the one thing that is left is that the poor have the gospel preached to them. That is to go on. Brethren will remember that Mr Darby speaks about it, saying that if brethren ceased to be evangelical they would die out; and what right has any of us, on the occasion provided for the preaching of the gospel, to be anything other than evangelical? One of Paul's most evangelical epistles is that to the Ephesians. There are references there to the death of Christ and the blood of Christ and our offences, transgressions and sins, and grace, mercy, and the great finality of what the glad tidings preached to the poor brings persons into, that there is that in which God can be served unto all generations of the age of ages. Paul's most triumphant level is that of the preaching of the gospel.

I say again, the one thing that remains of the Lord's own description of His service is that the poor have the gospel preached to them. Therefore, beloved, it behoves us to consider what enters into the gospel preaching, what is the gospel preaching about?

What quality and qualification enters into the preaching of it? As far as the preaching of the gospel is concerned little qualification is called for in the preacher. Of course he would need the ability to speak, but it is clear from Paul's epistle to the Galatians that he does not need to be able to speak especially well, he does not need to be able to speak as an oracle, he needs to be able to speak so that he can be understood. Paul says in Galatians "that in weakness of the flesh I announced the glad tidings to you at the first", chap 4: 13. Paul may have been describing his general condition or, as we might discern from what follows in verse 15, he may even have had some defect in his eyesight, but it is "in weakness of the flesh I announced the glad tidings to you at the first". He did not come to announce the glad tidings to the Galatians in great strength, vitality and power, he just came along as a man who believed in the gospel more than he believed in anything else and who overcame the weakness of his flesh in which he announced the glad tidings at the first. Of course, according to what Paul says to the Romans, the preacher needs to be sent, that is to say he has to have a word from God, and if he comes from the presence of God with a word, then it will meet whatever need there is in the company, because God sees the need far better than any preacher can see it. We may think that we know but we do not know people as God knows them. If God sends the preacher He will give him the word to meet just the condition of those that are there. He knows the condition of the poor, He knows in what respect you and I are poor. He knows whether we need revival in the great foundation truths of our whole standing with God, He knows whether our hearts need to be revived and drawn out again after Christ because of the great love with which God loved us and the great love with which Christ laid down His life for us. He knows whether we need to have our eyes pointed forward and upward in regard to divine things, He knows just what the present state of our poverty is. If any think that they are rich, let them just compare themselves with the riches of God's grace and, full though we may be, we will find that in comparison with the divine fulness we must always regard ourselves, relatively at least, as poor. We are never in a condition when we do not need the gospel preached to us.

If we think of what there is to be announced in the gospel we have to begin with God Himself, with One "with whom we have to do", Heb 4: 13. We have to do with God. Every day, every hour of every day, every minute of every hour, there is a God with whom we have to do; it is good to remember that. Not many of us here this evening are little children but it is good to bring up little children in the sense that there is a God with whom they have to do - One who has a right to call us to account, to seek into our motives and our objects, to seek into our lives and our history, the detail of what kind of persons we have been and are, and whether (which is almost the fulcrum of the glad tidings) we are in a fit state to dwell with God. That is what the gospel is about. It would strike some people that that was not saying very much; they would treat it airily or lightly (people in the world would treat almost any serious thing lightly at the present time), but having to do with God is a thing that very quickly will solemnise a man or woman. People speak about going to heaven when they die and quite a lot of them would be most unhappy there because, if the possibility could be envisaged of their being there apart from the work of Christ, they would be there conspicuous as in their sins. There is no way of being happy in heaven apart from Christ, and there is no way of being happy in your relations with God apart from Christ. It is unsatisfying and in the end disillusioning to treat the question of the God with whom we have to do as if it was optional. Having to do with God will expose to a man just the kind of man that he is. That is why so many people do not like to retain God in their knowledge; they seek all other kinds of things when, if they would only face the God with whom they have to do, they would find that every moral problem of their soul was resolved and they would be happy and at peace. Jesus says at the end of the chapter "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls". That is what the preaching of the glad tidings to the poor brings about - rest in the soul. What the gospel is calling people's attention to is the necessity of their having to do with God and facing that issue squarely, not turning away from it (although we

may well fear in the presence of God) but finding that the presence of God exposes to us just what we are. But the God with whom we have to do has Himself taken account of our condition and, as Paul says in Romans, "He who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all", chap 8: 32.

The preaching of the gospel cannot effectively be announced unless there is reference to God coming in in Christ, displaying here in perfection in manhood the attitude of God to men. He was taken by wicked hands and crucified and slain but He was dying for our sins. The preaching of the gospel has hardly begun if the work that Christ did on the cross as dying for our sins is not brought home to souls. He was not there on account of anything in Himself, save in the sense that He longed to have men in His company, and therefore He gave Himself to provide a basis for God in righteousness on which He could have others like Himself in His own environment. He died, not on account of anything that was in Him, but for our sins. Paul, in speaking of the glad tidings in 1 Corinthians 15, does not begin with the incarnation, although that is essential, but he says "I make known to you... the glad tidings which I announced to you... that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures (vv 1, 3). That is the preaching of the gospel to the poor. Paul goes over it step by step. He tells the Corinthians that Christ died for their sins, and that is what the preacher tells you this evening, and that is what the preacher should always tell you. "And that he was buried" - the preacher should tell you that, that Christ was buried in order to take out of God's sight for ever not only the sins that we have committed but the whole constitution of man which is characteristically sinful and can do nothing but sin. Also "that he was raised" - a touch of triumph comes into the preaching. Paul says in that chapter that "if Christ be not raised... ye are yet in your sins" (v 17). "But now", he says, "Christ is raised from among the dead". What a glorious thing that is! I recall once being at a reading on that chapter and the brother who was going to stand up and read the scripture said 'How much shall we read?'. The brethren looked down the chapter and estimated they would get to verse 19. The brother that was going to

read said 'We cannot leave the brethren there, most miserable of all men, we must go on to the next verse'. So he read "But now Christ is raised from among the dead, firstfruits of those fallen asleep". The preaching of the gospel according to the beginning of that chapter brings in not only that Christ died and was buried but that He was raised; as He Himself said in regard to His body: "in three days I will raise it up" John 2: 19. As Paul explains in Romans: "raised for our justification", chap 4: 25. Much enters into that. We cannot get away from these fundamental elements of the gospel: that God came into man's condition in Christ, sin apart, and in that condition Christ perfectly displayed the disposition of God so that men might have confidence in God and in the preaching of the gospel that would flow once Christ was raised from amongst the dead; and then that at the end He was taken and crucified and slain, and on the cross when He had died His blood was shed - a soldier pierced His side and forthwith there came out blood and water. Our minds reflect upon the scope for many preachings in the blood of Christ: if you preach about something else you would bring in what the blood of Christ has secured for God, and if you preach about the blood of Christ you would also be able to touch on the other aspects of His death and of His being buried and being raised. Paul goes over that step by step in Corinthians. It enters into the preaching of glad tidings to the poor. None of those many preachings could be detached from the basic elements of the gospel, with the way in which God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself not imputing their trespasses to them, a chapter which goes on to say "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him", 2 Cor 5: 21. As Paul goes over this he speaks of our being raised, which involves our justification, being made perfectly suitable for God. I suppose it would be right to say that justification makes you fit to have the best robe on; the best robe is not justification in itself but God puts it on what is already fit for Him. Christ is raised for our justification, and then He ascended. Paul does not in that chapter speak about the ascension of Christ, but he says He was seen. He was seen by Cephas and by five hundred brethren at once, and then last of all He

was seen by me, Paul says. Although none of us could take a place alongside the apostle Paul (something that can safely be said because the Lord says he is an elect vessel unto me), yet there is an experience available to us, an impression of a glorified Christ having meant something special to us. He appeared to Paul in a way that may not have been corporeal; but the purpose of it was to give him some distinctive impression of Christ glorified; and as we believe in Him, the Lord Jesus would give each of us some special impression of His glory that binds us to Himself for the rest of our lives.

So the Lord says the poor have the gospel preached to them. Of course the gospel leads people on into the depths of God, and these things that I have been speaking of are calculated to draw the soul out after the God who has not spared His own Son, and after Christ who gave Himself for us. They are calculated to affect us in a way that wins us: Mr Stoney says that the heart is won by His humiliation. They are calculated to bring the Person of the Lord Jesus before us to make the gospel real to us. What He was really saying to John is that I am still here and going on with My service, I am still doing the work that the Father gave Me to do and, apart from these outward signs, I am preaching the gospel to the poor. How attractive that is! This is a chapter of great stress, great anxiety, John questioning who He was, the cities in which His mighty works were done setting Him aside, scarcely any response anywhere, yet Jesus says "I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in thy sight". Jesus is standing there alone with rejection all round Him. Even as you listen to Him saying that to the Father your heart is drawn out to Him again and you reflect that He is in that condition in rejection in order that He might ultimately become your Saviour. This is what the preaching of the gospel has to do with, the state of men and women, the need of souls; it has to do with the preaching of a God who has known the need of souls perfectly and has provided what perfectly meets the need of the poor. It is very

blessed and affecting to think that this remains. I say again let us see that it does remain.

There are many depths into which we are led, even if we begin with the preaching of the gospel to sinners. In Luke 15 the young man had taken the benefit of what the father had to give to him and he was away in a far country; eventually when he came to himself he came back to his father. In its application he could only come back because the shepherd had gone out. I think that is another thing that Mr Stoney said or perhaps it was Mr Darby, that the father could not have come out if the shepherd had not gone out. We see in the way in which those things are bound together that because the shepherd had gone out the father could come out. There is much scope for the preaching of the gospel in relation to the father's house, what the music and dancing may convey, what the best robe and the sandals and the ring may convey. Have those things any real substance for us if we are left in doubt as to whether we have any righteous entitlement? But the righteous entitlement is that the shepherd went after it until he found it. Going after it involved the incarnation and the rejection and the cross and the grave, and it involved rising again; then there was ground on which the father could run out when somebody returned. I value that expression, it was because the shepherd had gone out that the father could come out; it helps us to understand the preaching of the gospel to the poor, that the side that belongs to the shepherd is essential if what belongs to the father is to have a substantial basis in our souls. The more truth we know, beloved, the deeper we get into it, the more danger we are in of detaching ourselves from our roots and thinking that there is a level of the truth that is above the preaching of the gospel; and that is just not true, because the gospel to the poor will always be related to the work of the Lord Jesus. As it is preached week by week it will grow in the affections of the saints, they will become more and more attracted to it. Why is it said that in every division the real issue is the Person of Christ? If the Person of Christ had been kept before the saints in the preaching, maybe some issues would never have arisen. If the reality of what He had done, the way He went, His

rejection, of the attitude of the world to Him; if the way the truth is in all these things had been maintained before the saints on the basis that they were the poor to whom the gospel had been preached, would we then take a lofty attitude and critically say this or that about doctrine that related to His Person? Or would we not have our eyes thankfully opened to some fresh glimpse of the glory of the One who came into man's condition in order to die? I remember once, when a beloved young brother was taken to be with Christ, being at the Supper the next day and thinking that there was one Man who came into the world to die; everyone else has come into the world to live, one Man came into the world to die. The preaching of the gospel to the poor attracts the heart to the Man who came into the world to die. Now, as He Himself says, He became dead and is alive to the ages of ages. The gospel to the poor attaches them to Him in a world where every need of every soul is satisfied, where there will always be more to fill each soul as it assimilates what it has already been satisfied with. The objective of the preaching is to engage souls with things that relate to the foundations of their spiritual lives. The necessity in the present day, even if everybody present already believes on the Lord Jesus and is saved, is that the glad tidings should still be announced. Many of us here preach, and I venture to urge upon all who preach, not just ourselves, that they should not confine the work of Christ to some brief statement about the facts of the gospel but that the work of Christ and the reality of who He is and what God is should be dwelt on so that the souls of the saints become more and more built up, buttressed by refreshment in the truth that they have known, the truth that in one sense has made them what they are, has given them a foundation on which what they are may be built. So the preaching of the gospel to the poor should not die out among us, not be substituted by teaching or anything else, because the Lord has over the whole history of the recovery confirmed the saints in having a special meeting for the preaching. Let the gospel be preached!

I just have these impressions beloved. If the Lord leaves us here let all of us who preach look to our preaching, that we are

preaching the gospel. It is the one thing that remains. I cannot open people's eyes (in fact the man in John 9 says since the world began it had never been heard of; since Jesus did it I suppose one could still say it has never been heard of). I cannot cleanse lepers and I cannot make deaf people hear, and I certainly cannot, nor can you make dead people wake up, unless you apply that morally; but one thing that we can still do is to preach the gospel to the poor. Let us not give it up, for His Name's sake.

CROYDON

12 December 1975

THE CHILDREN'S TASTING

During the long desert journey of the people of Israel, the young and growing children would remember no taste except that of the manna, their only food. Happy for them that they had not known the land of hard bondage and its spicy foods! The manna was gathered from the ground after the morning dew and the taste of it was like cake with honey. Thus it was both strength and sweetness for the daily need of each person - of great leaders like Moses and Miriam as well as of little boys and girls. More than thirty-four centuries ago therefore there was a sign, or type, of a constant food which we have for our hearts and minds as Christians now, Although we know Jesus glorified, we learn from the record in the Gospels how He lived in a humble life such as our own.

An unusual wall-text seen in a friend's house many years ago was a question asked by Job in ten short words - "is there any taste in the white of an egg?" Persons were expected to ask why such a question is in the Bible and would thus show some interest at least in God's word! When Satan was allowed to trouble him, Job had to endure many things that seemed to be without purpose, besides many that were painful too. This may be so with us but we learn by it that the Lord has a result to reach in our souls and He is of tender feeling towards us all the time.

Such history reminds us that precious stones have been formed under great pressure and the time may have been long. On the other hand God's purpose can be reached quickly. In one sentence of his first letter the apostle Peter mentions newborn babes eager for their simple food: in the next sentence his thoughts are on holy priests praising God. It is the result of tasting that the Lord is good that we come to Him continually for the pure milk of His word and thus grow up to salvation. This salvation is fully known only in being a living stone in God's house, called a "spiritual house" because it is built of those who have gladly received of His Spirit. Divine service is carried on there in a way that is pleasing to Him.

The Lord Jesus is prominent as "a precious cornerstone" but do you fill the place that is just for you?

J.C.Evershed