

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

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Contents

"TAKE UP THE ARK..... "

THE SECOND

RESPONSIVENESS

THE CHILDREN'S SAFETY

"TAKE UP THE ARK..... "

Joshua 3: 1-6; 2 Corinthians 1: 17-22; Luke 2: 25-33

J.L. I wondered if we could, with the Lord's help, enquire together as to the expression in chapter 3 of Joshua, the instruction to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and go over before the people". It would be in view of the inheritance being entered upon, and involves priestly activity and laying hold of Christ as the One in whom every promise of God is made good. The exercise in chapter 3 of Joshua would bear on the Colossian letter; that is, the great thought of entering the inheritance. The Lord would have us take up our inheritance and enter upon it, and I think the need of the present time is that the brethren should go in for what is spiritual, go in for the inheritance; that is, seek to live in the light of God's purpose, in the consciousness of a link with Christ in heaven as the One in whom every promise of God is sustained. Simeon, as he takes the Child in his arms, is really taking up the ark of the covenant; he is embracing the great thought of divine love and purpose. Luke would suggest the ark of the covenant; that is, how God is coming out in His disposition and in His grace, and in the relations into which He has entered with men in view of blessing. Simeon is embracing that in a very wide way - "a light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel". Maybe we could be helped in enquiring as to how we can enter upon this priestly exercise in view of what is heavenly and spiritual being enjoyed and sustained amongst us.

A.A.B-n. Would the place that Christ has in our affections have a bearing on it? "In him is the yea, and in him the amen" - the ark of the covenant. Would it be an appreciation of the One who has secured everything?

J.L. Paul was setting that out in the second letter to Corinth and bringing Christ before the brethren as the One who is in Himself the verification of every thought of God for blessing in relation to His people. I think it is wonderful that we can appropriate Christ in this connection and see that He is the yea and amen; that is, He has not only set matters on but He has completed them, and He is in Himself

the proof and witness and verification that every promise of God in relation to men is fulfilled.

A.A.B-n. In Joshua 3 there is an immediate answer: "And they took up the ark of the covenant". What would be in that?

J.L. I believe it is how we can appropriate Christ as the One in whom there is the fulfilment of every thought of God in relation to His covenant, which involves blessing for men; because, while there is no covenant made with the assembly, God will yet make a new covenant with Israel, and the cup to us is the witness that all that Israel will come into by way of blessing and covenant relations is conveyed to us now in the glad tidings; the cup, the blood of Christ, is the witness of that.

J.M. Entering into the inheritance involves exercise: "And Joshua rose early in the morning". You cannot take up these matters in a slipshod way, can you?

J.L. You feel that. The people have come to a certain point. There has been the movement of energy in the Spirit, and certain enemies, Sihon and Og, overcome; and the movement in liberty as to the leading of the Spirit has been known. They come to the Jordan, and faith and a certain subjective state are needed for it. The reference to the Spirit in Colossians is a subjective reference - "Your love in the Spirit" (chap 1: 8); that is, it is the state subjectively of the brethren that is equal to entering. Along with that there is the teaching of circumcision.

R.S.R. Would the victuals in chapter 1 give us a spiritual constitution to go over? Is it not strong food which we need constitutionally? The Man of the gospels is strong food.

J.L. Surely. I think it is appropriating Christ in this connection. The manna was food for the wilderness. The young people amongst us should experience that, that in the wilderness life there is grace for every day in that lowly humanity that was here for the will of God. But food for entering the land, victuals as you say, is feeding on Christ as He comes on to view in the gospels, doing the will of God and carrying everything through for God.

A.A.B-n. When they come to the Jordan they have to lodge there before they pass over. Would these victuals strengthen us to appreciate the death of Christ in this particular way?

J.L. Yes, and too the Person of Christ, as Paul presents Him in Colossians. He is attracting the souls of the brethren by the greatness of who Christ is personally.

A.C.C. The priests are prominent here, not so much the Levitical side, in taking up the ark. Does that support your thought as to a subjective state ?

J.L. Yes, it is a priestly action; that is, the subjective state is seen in the brethren at Colosse, the one reference to the Spirit being a subjective reference.

A.C.C. I see the importance of a priestly state in view of taking up the ark.

J.R. The priests are very closely associated with the ark; in fact they are required to complete the type. It says "When ye see the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then remove from your place". It shows the importance of priesthood.

J.L. And the need for it in view of the inheritance being enjoyed. We speak much about the inheritance but I suppose it is really eternal life. The blessing that God has for men is bound up in the enjoyment of eternal life.

J.M. In Luke 2 it says of Simeon that "the Holy Spirit was upon him" as he received Him into his arms. Is that the state you are referring to?

J.L. Yes, a man in Jerusalem. Paul said he did not use lightness; "the Son of God... has been preached", he says. That is the priestly state of things in the servant, and shows how closely he is identified with the ark of the covenant.

A.C.C. These early chapters in 2 Corinthians are largely for the ministers, but the over-riding thought is the priesthood. It is a priestly epistle

J.L. Yes; therefore it represents that state that is in all of us as having to do with God and the things of God. So it is the character of the ministers, "ministers of the new covenant" (2 Cor 3: 6); not exactly the ministry of the new covenant but the character of the thing in persons. It involves what is priestly.

J-n.M. It also says "competent", as if they were in the enjoyment of what they were setting out. Would that be the way in which others would be inclined to follow?

J.L. Yes, they are fitted, in the sense of being qualified. "Fitted to every good work" (2 Tim 3: 17) is fitted in the sense that the person is qualified to take it up. It would be as having the Spirit.

J.H. We speak of going over by way of attraction. That would be what is here - "When ye see the ark".

J.L. That is very fine. These are some of the expressions that have come down to us, in the teaching of the truth, from our fathers. One of those expressions is that we are forced over the Red Sea, there is an enemy pursuing. But we are going over the Jordan in the power of attraction to Christ who has entered in, attracted into the heavenly land; and Paul is alluring the brethren into it in the way he speaks about Christ in the Colossian letter, because it is what He is personally that is engaging the soul.

A.F. "When ye see the ark" - would that be spiritual and priestly concentration in relation to what was obtaining at the moment in the divine movements?

J.L. Yes. Think of what can be seen in Christ in this connection as the ark of the covenant! It is not exactly the ark of the Lord of all, the earth, that is more Matthew's presentation. Mark is the ark of the testimony; Luke is more the ark of the covenant, what has come within our range in Christ position made known in Him.

A.F. The ark of the covenant - the faithfulness of God.

J.L. That is beautiful. Where would we be apart from God's faithfulness?

R.S.R. You get the impression that the ark determines everything: "When ye see the ark... then remove... and go after it".

J.L. Yes, that is energy in movement by the Spirit. Priestliness really means that we are spiritual.

S.Y. Was it the heavenly Man that sustained Stephen?

J.L. Yes, he saw the glory of God and Jesus at the right hand of God.

S.Y. Mr Stoney said he had been into heaven and come out to face all that was against him.

J.L. We would like to live like that. I am sure we would all like to live more in the blessedness of the purpose of God for men, to be true to it.

J.R. Is not the ark related to the purpose of God and God's system of things, not so much related to our need? It is the centre of the divine system.

J.L. Surely, the One in whom His testimony centres and the One through whom His thoughts of blessing are conveyed from the divine side, all in love's faithfulness.

J.R. Later we have David's exercises regarding the ark, that there might be suited conditions for it. It was really priesthood on his part.

J.L. Yes, the priest is thinking for God. Priestliness involves that persons are spiritual and thinking for God. Paul does not use the expression much, if at all, in his gentile epistles, but he does use the expression "ye who are spiritual" (Gal 6: 1) and that would be priestly. The expression as to what is priestly is used in the letter to the Hebrews but when he is writing to the gentile assemblies he uses the word spiritual.

W.L. Would the measurement be a spiritual, priestly matter? It is not to be by guesswork but "two thousand cubits by measure".

J.L. How unique and distinctive Christ is! The two thousand cubits involves that, that He is ever distinguished and unique. No matter

how you see Him, no matter how close we can be alongside Him as in sonship, Christ is unique and distinct, and will be so eternally.

J.D.G. In Colosse the danger was diversion. Yet the brethren were holy brethren. It would seem that there was a certain state there, as you have remarked, but as we have the Person of Christ before us does that preserve us from diversion?

J.L. I think so. The danger was that human thinking - philosophy and vain deceit - would intrude. Yet they had received the Christ; that would be an affectionate reference. But there was what Paul could appeal to in the brethren at Colosse, and there was a state there to which he could present the attractiveness of Christ and what He is personally. In Colossians He is Head on personal grounds.

A.C.C. We used to hear a good deal about Christ on God's side. I suppose the ark is largely that, if not altogether. It is a great comfort that everything is secure in Him in a day of breakdown, but your point is that everything is secure in Him in view of our enjoyment of the inheritance.

J.L. Exactly, in view of our taking it up. So that from this viewpoint we can get as much of the inheritance as we go in for. We can have as much enjoyment of what is spiritual as we want because the Spirit will help us as far as we are prepared to go.

A.A.B-n. As these great purposes of God have a place in our affections and minds, and these suited conditions are brought about, there is something for God either in the individual or in the company, and in that there is enjoyment for us. God has His place as Christ is given His.

J.L. I am sure that is right. As we take it up, God gets His inheritance.

A.A.B-n. In Deuteronomy 8 Moses describes the land as "a land of waterbrooks"; it is attractively presented. Now Joshua is about to go over and take possession. The outlining of it by Moses is one thing, but now it is a matter of taking possession. Would you say

something as to what the inheritance is. God's inheritance is in the saints. What is our inheritance?

J.L. Christ is presented to us for our appropriation, but the inheritance as God's gift is that we should enjoy eternal life. What is the use of an inheritance unless we can take it up. A lot of people die and never gain their inheritance. But if we have an inheritance and it is a wealthy one, the need is to take it up, and that means that we come into the enjoyment of eternal life. I think Mr Taylor sen taught us that the inheritance is eternal life, the calling is sonship.

J.R. For saints of the present dispensation it would be of a heavenly order. We shall enter it when the Lord comes but what is heavenly is to be entered into and enjoyed now.

J.L. That is, we are not waiting until the rapture to enjoy what is heavenly. The joy can be as great now as it will be eternally because we have the Spirit as the earnest. So that it is a present, living matter for faith.

J.R. It is a great test as to what we know about this practically. I have no doubt we are meant to live in heaven and be visitors down here. We tend to live down here and visit heaven.

J.L. Mr Lyon said that the Philippian saints had their roots in heaven and the foliage was down here, the tree upside down!

R.S.R. Mr Raven mourned in his day that people did not cater for their own happiness. We get bogged down here so much that we do not really cater for spiritual things.

J.L. Well, it becomes a test as to what appeals to me. Mr Raven urged the brethren to pursue what would minister to their own happiness.

A.A.B-n. Do you think our tastes are sharpened and cultivated through the experience of the Supper and what flows from it? That really is the Christian's life, so it would give a certain direction and tone for the rest of the week.

J.L. So that the announcement, properly understood, shows that you are a witness to that, you are announcing His death till He come.

Really the appearing is your soul, and you are announcing it publicly and declaring allegiance to Christ where He is, and are a traitor to this world.

J.S. Would the announcing His death be like Hebrews 11: "For they who say such things shew clearly that they seek their country" (v 14)? It would be a plain matter.

J.L. Abraham "waited for the city which has foundations, of which God is the artificer and constructor", Heb 11: 10. That is, the promises to Abraham were secured in Isaac, secured in Christ risen. So He is the yea and the amen.

J.H. Do we, in the service, actually take certain ground, by faith? "Raised with him through faith", Col 2: 12. We take that ground by faith and in the power of the Spirit in view of the service.

J.L. I would say that; quickening is in that connection. In Colossians we are buried with Him, raised with Him, and quickened together with Christ. The word "together" is there.

A.C.C. What was quoted from Hebrews is interesting because it speaks of giving up our country for a better. That is our difficulty, we do not prefer the better.

J.L. That is why I said I find I am tested by my preferences, by what appeals to me. It is so easy to live down here in our business or our family, and enjoy all the benefits that God brings to us on the wilderness side of the Jordan, and maybe not have the energy of faith and the Spirit to pursue what is to minister to and cater for our own happiness.

J.S-n. It says "remove from your place, and go after it". Is it a question of where Christ is? That really determines where I am going to be.

J.L. Yes, we are attracted over. So the preaching of the Son of God is intended to attract us to where He is and the realm that He fills.

A.A.B-n. That would be the only power to dispossess. We could not have anything unless we have the energy of faith in dispossessing so that the inheritance becomes ours.

J.L. We get what we put our feet on.

J.R. Christ, as the anti-type of the ark, has opened up territory beyond death. The way is open for us now. You mentioned the personal glories of Christ in Colossians. If He engages our affections and we are attracted to Him, we shall want to be where He is. He desires us to be where He is, which is, of course, a 'beyond death' order of things, a resurrection and heavenly order of things. We have to face death and burial here but it is in the glory of the place where Christ is.

J.L. Exactly. So that the reference to circumcision in Colossians is probably the most sweeping one in Scripture - "the circumcision of the Christ", chap 2: 11. That is how God terminated all that line of things - in Christ.

J.R. We get a touch of it at the Supper, what it means to be over Jordan, beyond death, and have relationships with Christ and with one another beyond death. The exercise is to live in that through the week.

J.L. Is not that really the enjoyment of eternal life, not as it will bear upon men in the millennium, but as it bears upon ourselves now, that we are living in the light of this order of things that is spiritual and heavenly and is connected with the Son of God and the world that He fills and of which He is the centre.

J-n.M. You referred to the sweeping character of the statement in Colossians. Is it not also a very attractive one, that the end in view would help us to face the exercise in view of being in the enjoyment of things in Christ's sphere?

J.L. That is how we face the matter. In view of the inheritance the reproach of Egypt was to be rolled away. The exercise of Gilgal had to be gone through in that connection.

A.F. Would you say that our enjoyment of the inheritance is in the measure that we are where the Father and the Son are? I am thinking of the Lord's words in John 17: "this is the eternal life, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom

thou hast sent" (v 3). The enjoyment of the inheritance takes us over into the heavenly side of things, does it not?

J.L. I think that expression shows how the enjoyment of eternal life is bound up with the *knowledge* of divine Persons. That is, eternal life is a sphere, an out-of-the-world, heavenly order of relationships and being in which the brethren can live in the light of Christ's present place exalted, and in the light of God's purpose for men, entered upon by the Spirit.

W.L. The materialistic character of the present day seems to have played a large part in the lack of an ear for the gospel. Do you think it may also have a tendency to dull our tastes for what is heavenly?

J.L. We can speak each for ourselves. I think the Lord would continually keep the need of this side of things before our minds. It is possible to live where Christ is. So eternal life is an order of relationships among the brethren. In the midst of a scene of death, in the midst of a materialistic world in which we are, we can live in the light of what is heavenly and spiritual.

J.R. Paul was living there in this first chapter of 2 Corinthians, was he not? There was intense suffering, despairing even of life - "we ourselves had the sentence of death in ourselves" (v 9) - but he had his life elsewhere.

J.L. Is Paul really taking up the ark of the covenant in this chapter?

J.R. Well, he speaks of "the Son of God, Jesus Christ".

J.L. Yes, and he says that He was not yea and nay. Paul is, I think, showing the brethren the way into the land.

J.R. He himself was consistent with that; he was not yea and nay either.

J.L. No, he was not. That is where he was living, and that is where Simeon was living in Luke 2.

A.C.C. As to things which might detain us on this side (we have referred to the materialistic kind of world we have to do with), a very simple evidence of it might be, a fellowship meeting within easy

reach and just staying at home. We are tested by our tastes, as you said.

J.L. That is a practical exercise.

J.S. Do you think that the working out of these inclinations you spoke of is seen in Romans 8: "the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit life and peace" (v 6)? Is that the inward working out of these inclinations that we find in ourselves? Would "life and peace" suggest what speaks of eternal life?

J.L. Yes, pursuing what would minister to our own happiness.

J.H. The preaching of the Son of God involves what you have in mind, another Man is another world. Our tastes should be directed that way.

J.L. Yes, a Man who fills that world and fills it for God, the One in whom God's testimony and His covenant are sustained. That is, every blessing, every promise that God has for man, is fulfilled and witnessed to in Christ where He is. He is my righteousness, my peace, my justification before God. Eternal life is presented to us in Him where He is. John always presents eternal life as in the Son.

A.A.B-n. Our enjoyment of that is being at home with Him where He is, so that we would be at home amongst the brethren where He is loved and where His things have a place. Even in meetings such as these fellowship meetings there is something flowing, it is beyond what is local. The truth is valued amongst the brethren in a district and Christ is appreciated. It is developing and holding the saints in this line of the inheritance, is it not?

J.L. Yes, and on that side we can get as much as we want to go in for, not on the basis of law but attracted into it.

S.Y. We need a spiritual appetite for these things.

J.L. Well, the lord would stimulate an appetite with us. I am sure it is there amongst the brethren but the Lord would continually stimulate it. So Simeon in Luke 2, as he takes the Child in his arms, says "Lord, now thou lettest thy bondman go... in peace". He is ready to go; he is there already in his spirit.

J.N. Do we get the thought of completeness in these three scriptures? It is one thing to have the inheritance, but the Spirit would bring us into the joy of it. So Simeon is complete now, he can go.

J.L. The Spirit is the power for our entrance into what is spiritual. From the brazen serpent there was movement right into the inheritance.

J.R. The food of the 6th of John is important - eating His flesh and drinking His blood. That would save us from any materialistic outlook, would it not? He gave His life for the world.

J.L. Eating His flesh and drinking His blood is feeding on Christ as dead.

J.R. It is food for our affections too.

J.L. It is. Then there is feeding on Him as He is - "He also who eats me shall live also on account of me" (v 57). I think Mr Taylor sen pointed out as to that, that Christ lived in His Father's interests and that He lived on account of the Father. As we commit ourselves to Him we feed on Christ, we live here in relation to His interests, because He lived in relation to His Father's interests.

J.R. So an occasion like this belongs to His interests. We need to be saved, not only from the world, but from the earth and our own comforts. It is a heavenly calling we are called to.

J.M. Is that why Paul uses this reference to lightness?

J.L. There was sobriety in Paul's movements and ministry among them. He was concerned to get the brethren on to the level of what was spiritual because what was carnal and natural had been governing them.

A.C.C. No one could be light in the presence of the Jordan. In John 6 the emphasis is on the death of Christ as having finished with everything here. That is really the Jordan, not the Red Sea.

J.L. We stand still at the Red Sea and see what God has done for us in the death of Christ, but the Jordan involves depth of the

exercise, that we face death practically and face it actually finally.

J.R. I thought Paul was facing it in this chapter (2 Cor 1): "But we ourselves had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not have our trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (v 9). It was a practical experience for Paul, was it not?

J.L. That is very good. He demonstrated that among the brethren; they could see the quickened state of Paul's soul, the evidence of the quickening of the Spirit. So he refers later to "the dying of Jesus" (chap 4: 10), that was the committal of Christ from the mount of transfiguration to the cross, that period when the dying of Jesus was witnessed.

R.S.R. He says "did I then use lightness?" Were not the Corinthians accusing Paul of vacillation in his movements?

J.L. Yes, and they were saying other things too about him. But his concern is that he should get them responding to the way he is taking up the ark of the covenant.

J.B. "Yea is in him". The footnote says 'the verification of all divine truth is in the Person of Christ'.

J.L. That is, He not only set things on but He completed them, and they are established in Him. What a feature of glory that is as attaching to Christ!

J.M. As over against "lightness", Paul is showing the saints in Corinth that he is in the full enjoyment of what he is speaking about.

J.L. And he wants them to be in it too; "For whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen, for glory to God by us". That is, the effect in the saints is to be for glory to God.

J.R. Paul wants to take the saints with him - "Now he that establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God".

J.L. The anointing imparts dignity; there is the stamp of divine ownership put on the saints. Paul identifies himself with the brethren in this, as established, anointed and sealed "and given the earnest of the Spirit".

R.S.R. What is your impression of a "man in Jerusalem"? Mr Taylor sen referred to Simeon as an assembly man who had an assembly outlook. Would that not govern us in all you have said today? If we are assembly-minded persons we would have no difficulty.

J.L. "A man in Jerusalem", I think, is a man who is in touch with God and with His purpose. The assembly characteristically is governing him.

A.A.B-n. He had some understanding of what the gentiles were to come into.

J.L. Yes. It shows the width of divine blessing. Simeon is in the light of that. All is secured in that Babe in his arms. Simeon sees every purpose and promise of God established in Christ, and he is ready to go in the light of that, as if everything is then for him fulfilled in the light of God's salvation.

J-n.M. On that character of man Christ could write the name of the city of His God.

J.L. Yes, that is very profound; "and my new name", Rev 3: 12. The overcomer in Philadelphia is material that can be divinely written upon. God's work in the saints is capable of taking on impressions that will be eternal.

GRANGEMOUTH

19 April 1975

Key to initials

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THE SECOND

D.L.Stewart

Numbers 9: 9-13; 1 Kings 19: 3-8; Mark 8: 22-26

What is in mind in the passage in Mark's gospel is the second touch. The blind man needed a second touch. It would be true to say that every one of us needs that; indeed, as our history proceeds, we need more than one second touch. It does not indicate, indeed we could not think that this suggests, that there was something incomplete about the Lord's work. This man came under the immediate attention of Christ Himself. It says in an earlier passage as to another incident that the people said "He does all things well", Mark 7: 37. There is not anything to be added to the work of Christ. His work for our salvation is a work that abides and will abide to all eternity. The need of a second touch would relate to our experience: we do not make progress oftentimes as well as we should. I think everyone would admit it, and the wonder is that the Lord is ready to serve us, serve us with a second touch. We want to come under His hand; we want to make ourselves available to come under the hand of Christ for another touch. It says, after Jesus laid His hands *again* upon his eyes, that "he saw distinctly" and that he "saw all things clearly". What a matter to have that kind of eyesight! There are so many problems that we have to face in our spiritual histories and so much confusion around us and in the Christian profession that we need to be under the Lord's hand to get this touch and to see distinctly.

I think that this second touch involves the gift of the Holy Spirit. The ability to see things and to discern relates to making room for the Spirit. It is a marvellous thing that there is not only Christ's work in all its excellence and perfection and permanency, but there is the work of the Spirit, and the wonderful fact that God should give us of His Spirit. The woman in chapter 4 of John's gospel said as to the water, "Sir, give me this water" (v 15). The Lord had said that the water would be in him "a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life", and the woman says "Give me this water"; she asked of the

Lord. He is the great administrator; God has placed everything in the hands of Christ as a Man, a glorified, exalted Man, and He is the great administrator of all God's bounty.

Then another scripture speaks of the Father giving the Holy Spirit. If we have a need, a spiritual need, a need of satisfaction, a need of spiritual eyesight, we can go to the Father and ask. I wonder if every one of us here has had the experience of asking for the Holy Spirit. You could not ask for anything greater in this scene; and the Father, it says, will "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him", Luke 11: 13. It is spiritual persons that have eyesight, it is the spiritual that discerns (see 1 Cor 2: 15). If we give way to the flesh and develop worldly tendencies our spiritual sight gets blurred and things look difficult and we do not know where we are going; but a person who yields himself to the blessed Spirit can see things, see things clearly; in spite of all the difficulties there may be outwardly, a spiritual person can see the Lord's mind and see what He would have us do and where He would have us to be.

Then it says in this chapter that "he sent him to his house, saying, Neither enter into the village, nor tell it to any one in the village". You will find that in many gospel incidents the Lord sends persons to their house. The house is the place where we are probably weakest, and where we have perhaps failed most, and He would send us back there in the power of the Spirit and enable us to be a testimony in our own house. It is not a question of going to the village or to the city or going to the world with the gospel, but what the Lord would bring to bear upon us is this question of going to our house. He says to another man, "tell them how great things the Lord has done for thee", Mark 5: 19. Well, we want to be on the line of coming under the Lord's hand and His touch, His second touch, and then His word as to our house.

In the scripture read in Kings what is in mind is the second time. Elijah is a great man; who of us could stand alongside him? How careful we should be in what we say as to an honoured servant of God, a man who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (see 2 Kings 2: 11). How outstanding a servant of God was this man! Yet in

this passage he is running away from his responsibility. Now who of us has not run away? Who of us has not felt like running away? We get down in our souls and lose sight of the Lord and of the blessing. He sat down under a broom-bush and "requested for himself that he might die". "Take my life", he says. I do not know if we have got as far down as that, but scripture gives us such as examples. How is the Lord going to treat us when we let Him down, as we do? Is He going to say, I have had enough, this is the end? Elijah lies down and sleeps and an angel came and touched him; at his head was a cake baked on hot stones. It is a wonderful thing to have relations with divine Persons. What infinite grace enters into the way the Lord would handle us! How carefully, how gently, how perfectly He does it, even when we let Him down, even when we give up and run away! The Lord would not have us to run away from our responsibilities. The Spirit is the power, and the alone power, to fulfil every responsibility. So it says that the angel came and touched him "the second time", and he rises up and goes in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. It is a wonderful thing to get back to the great basic thoughts of God, the mount of God. What a place to go back to! It was the place where God had revealed His thoughts for His people (see Exod 3). He indicated what He was to be to them, and the purpose of His love. He Himself was to be their deliverer and He was to bring them out and to bring them in to the good land of His purpose. These are God's thoughts at Horeb. It is not Sinai, it is not the mountain of demand; it is the mountain of supply, of grace and purpose, of God's love, and God's heart being made known. So he goes in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. Well, this is the second time, emphasising God's dealings, the Lord's dealings, His care for His own, His perfect care for us.

Now in the book of Numbers we have the second year and in the passage read the second month. This relates to the history of the children of Israel after they came out of Egypt and a whole year had passed. It is a question whether every one of us has gone through to the second year. The first year is the year of God's grace, the way

He meets everything and supplies everything Himself; in that year the tabernacle was reared up and the cloud came upon it, and we learn in the second year that God has a centre upon earth, He has a testimony on this earth. It is not now a question of our blessing only, it is a question of God Himself having set His testimony here in this scene. Our blessing then is linked up with God's testimony and that testimony is Christ. There is no other testimony. There is a vessel of testimony: Christ is on high now but the Spirit is here, and the Spirit is indwelling the assembly of God and the assembly is the vessel of God's testimony.

The question arises here as to the keeping of the passover, and certain persons were not able to do so. It was one of God's requirements that Israel should hold the passover. It was the reminder of the fact that in Egypt the destroying angel had passed over the houses of the Israelites because of the blood of the lamb upon the doorposts and upon the lintels. He says "When I see the blood, I will pass over you", Exod 12: 13. That was ever to be remembered. Every year there was to be a remembrance; they were to eat the lamb roast with fire. It is a necessity that we should feed upon that kind of food. If we are going to make progress month after month, year after year, the basis of it lies in the food that we eat, and the basic food of the Christian, as of Israel here, is the passover lamb. Paul in Corinthians would indicate that: "our passover, Christ", he says, "has been sacrificed", 1 Cor 5: 7. So there is the need of feeding upon the lamb roast with fire, the fact that Christ is God's lamb, that He bore in an unmitigated way the judgment of God in relation to sin, bore it in His body. We have to feed on that kind of food. The unleavened bread is a kind of bread that does not inflate the flesh; it keeps us lowly, keeps us humble. The bitter herbs are for self-judgment. We have constantly to feed upon that kind of food if we are going to make progress.

These persons here missed the feast of the first month for some reason, and there is a provision made that they would be given another opportunity. In the history of things in the Christian dispensation there were the days of Pentecost, the days of the

apostles, when things were in their flush, in their power and in their glory. Wonderful days these were! The Lord had just gone on high and the Spirit had come here, indwelling men and women in the assembly, and the power of these days was marvellous, nothing could stand before it. Paul goes out in his mission and the world as it were is brought down. But we do not belong to these days; we belong to a time when everything publicly has broken down, everything is in pieces outwardly. Yet the Spirit of God would indicate to us that there is the second month; there is an opportunity for us to enter into these things and have the enjoyment of them and have a little sense, a little experience, of the power of Christianity, by the Spirit, even although we have missed these extraordinary days at the beginning of the dispensation. So it says, "according to every ordinance" of it: there is not a thing in Christianity that we cannot enjoy by the Spirit in spite of the smallness and weakness of things now. It is for us to set ourselves in relation to it. These men were anxious about it, anxious not to miss anything. The Spirit of God through Moses indicates the fact that there is an opportunity for them in the second month. Well, that is the kind of opportunity that is open to us. The first feast of Israel's dispensation was the passover. It opened the way for the other great feasts of the year (see Lev 23). The great matter in Christianity is the Lord's supper; that is the basis of all our Christian life, our Christian experience, assembly experience; everything flows from it. For two or three meeting together in His name all the blessings of Christianity in a spiritual way are open as we take part rightly in that great institution of the Lord's in relation to Christianity. May the Lord help us to stir ourselves in relation to these things. Some are neglectful of the Supper in these days; yet there is His grace on the one hand, the second touch and the second time and then the opportunity that is open to us in the second month. May the Lord bless His word.

EDINBURGH

20 April 1976

RESPONSIVENESS

A.J.E.Welch

Job 38: 1-7; Genesis 24: 64-67

We have fittingly begun this occasion with a note of praise. We may well begin every occasion with such a note, but it confirms the concern to bring up this question of responsiveness, quickness and spontaneity of response. The assembly, above every other family of the redeemed, is the great vessel of response; not only specifically in what we speak of as the service of God, the prime occasion of the week, but at any time. The affectionate intelligence which rightly has its place in the assembly is constantly to find expression Godward, is constantly to manifest itself in intense interest in everything that God may disclose Himself to be doing at any time. The Father, and the Son, and the Spirit, I believe, would count on the sympathetic, intelligent concern of the assembly for everything that They may do. If we get some grasp of this, the divine operations become so deeply interesting, and yet the interest is to promote the depth of feeling sympathy with what the blessed God is doing for Himself and His own satisfaction. I wonder if we have, in these closing moments, yet touched the living interest in divine activities which the Spirit of God would promote amongst us, alert and watchful for every touch of God's work, alert and watchful for every distinctive divine movement, whatever its character, that at every point God may have those who love Him and enter in the deepest sympathy into what He is doing, and whose voices are in liberty lifted in praise, thanksgiving, prayer maybe, as to what is proceeding. I believe the Spirit of God would produce in these closing moments of the testimony, intelligent, deep feeling as to everything that comes from God; what He may intimate as to His own glory especially governing us peculiarly in the service of praise, but His every activity for blessing and fruit for Himself. We hear of persons recovered, as we speak; we rejoice. God has something for Himself in that. If we see possibilities for recovery, we rejoice and we pray, because we understand what the operation of recovering power and the fruits of it mean to God. How He would

draw out our sympathetic, alert interest at this present time! How, in consequence, every occasion of our gathering is to be marked by readiness. What will the Spirit of God bring into this meeting? If we are privileged to assemble tomorrow, what will He bring in through our enquiry together? A sense of readiness, and alertness to hear His voice and discern His movements would mean that we lose no time. It would mean that there is a certain efficiency in the use of time as we assemble, as time of being assembled is peculiarly fruitful time and we would seek to be available that it may be used for the maximum result for the heart of God.

So this remarkable appeal of Jehovah to Job raises the question whether Job has understanding - a salutary question as to what we are saying: "Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who set the measures thereof - if thou knowest?" There are things, dear brethren, that we should know. There is that in which instruction has been furnished richly from God. The question comes, do we know things? Have we an intelligent appreciation, by the Spirit, of what has been committed to the saints? "If thou knowest". It is as if the Spirit of God would say to Job, Just how far, in spite of all the speaking, have you progressed in what really relates to God Himself? Do we know anything of this? Then we have this remarkable d is closure: "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy". What an answer! It goes back, I suppose, to a reference to some angelic company, if we take it as a literal reference. From whence did this answer spring? Think of such an answer being furnished as the creatorial power of God came into expression. "The morning stars sang together". Not only is the feature of response there, but it is response in unison - together; a fine thing, dear brethren, when we can move in this happy, spontaneous unison, in answer to some display of divine power. It tests us, perhaps, as to just how, by the Spirit, we are close to one another in taking on divine thoughts and answering to them. The morning stars sang together. Why should that thought be brought in, save as to bring out the divine feelings about this matter? And where will those feelings find their distinctive answer? Instruction would

lead us to say that God would seek an answer such as this supremely in the assembly, the great vessel of response. And the sons - "all the sons of God shouted for joy"; all of them. That is to say that none was outside of this harmonious chorus of response. You see how the feature of energy and spontaneity comes into things. We see it here and we see it in Rebecca in her spring from the camel; energetic, spontaneous movement in reference to a display of divine glory. This is what the Spirit of God would promote, that on the one hand we be watchful and on the other hand that we be quick to furnish the intelligent, affectionate answer that God Himself would seek to some fresh manifestation of Himself and His own activities to our hearts.

Well now this company, I suppose, would be very largely spectators of what was taking place. It is a question of what they discerned to be happening and the answer that was produced in them. When we come to Rebecca we have something far deeper because she is personally involved in the most intimate sense in what is proceeding. It is a very great matter to be sustained in the sense of this; but as God is active in our time it is not just a question of being spectators of what He does, because we are immediately, intimately and necessarily involved in what He is doing. The assembly is in view in this time of the Spirit. What place have we given in our minds and affections to Christ and to the assembly? You feel you discern the feelings of a man like Paul when he says, at a particular juncture, "I speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly", Eph 5: 32.

In Genesis 24 what a history this was of which we read the culmination! How Rebecca had shone at each point of it, even to the point at which the servant is amazed at what he sees. You may say, What a lesson! We read through this history (I suppose we have read it and spoken of it often); but do we read it in detachment from what it really conveys and its immediate, real bearing upon us? Have we any spring such as Rebecca had? Is it as we seek Christ that the spring comes into view? I believe there is this spring increasingly. I am not suggesting any lack in this respect but rather to strengthen

and stimulate the positive side of this matter. She sprang from the camel; it is the immediateness of her response as she saw the one for whom she was secured, to be in the bond of union with him, to be alone for this glorious Man that he is in type; that is to say, Jesus Himself. Do we involve ourselves in that, dear brethren? If we speak of the assembly, are we involving ourselves, in our own minds, in what the assembly really is, because it is to appear in our time in reality of life and power in persons, that the assembly in that sense is locatable, something that the Spirit of God can, in a certain degree, call attention to, vitally found in persons in localities. Impressions of the Lord's day remain still, what God worked out in those places to which we referred. The assembly was there. It was not yet clothed with the full instruction as to what is involved in it, which came in through Paul in the chapters later, but the assembly was there. We thank God that though we do not claim to be it - far be the thought - but we can locate the assembly in this city: Let us, therefore, be concerned about the responsive side which in all its sensitiveness and attractiveness to heaven belongs in the assembly, that every fresh movement yields something responsively in praise, that every fresh touch of divine glory produces immediate stimulation so that things proceed with spring. What a wonderful feature that is, when things in the assembly proceed with spring, which is normal and which the Spirit of God would sustain in the features of life appearing among the saints. What a history this was! How ready Rebecca was to follow the man. "I *will* go", she said (v 58). That is to say, she is ready to leave every element of natural influence that would detain her; she is ready to go, in principle, all the way with this man. Sometimes - I say it for myself, feelingly - we are slow to leave the matters that may have occupied us during the day; but can we not say, as an occasion like this arrives, I will go? That is to say, we will move with the Spirit, we will move in view of Christ having His portion, we will move in view of the true qualities of this vessel coming vitally into evidence for the delight of His heart and the satisfaction of the heart of God.

Well, this feature is one that often appears in Scripture, the side of responsiveness directly to God Himself, the side of intense sympathy with His own thoughts; but I believe the Spirit of God will bring it out in peculiar depth in these closing moments and will give us to have part in that. May He do so, for His Name's sake.

LONDON

25 May 1976

THE CHILDREN'S SAFETY

We are thankful for the many means provided to keep us safe when we journey by land, sea or air. When, as a youngster, I travelled fourth class on a foreign train it was very uncomfortable - but quite as safe as first class! At sea the well-known danger signal S. O.S. is said to stand for 'save our souls' and this shows how urgent the need is. But no mere human means can save a soul, whereas trust in the blood of Jesus, shed at Calvary, is an eternal shelter from judgment. The Hebrew children on the Passover night probably did not see the blood on the outside of the house-door and may well have been in great alarm. So the believer does not see the actual blood of the Lord, but has peace in knowing the value of it in the sight of God.

Safety is not salvation but should lead to it. A shipwrecked voyager would be safe in a lifeboat but not really saved until happily on land again amongst those loved and loving. The vivid story of Paul's last shipwreck tells us that all the two hundred and seventy six persons on board came safely to land. Scripture calls them "souls" showing that heaven yearned for their eternal salvation - more important than the need of the moment. It must have been wonderful to those seafarers, cast away on an unknown island on a cold, wet day, to find themselves cared for with unusual kindness for three whole months. Paul and his company were given presents of necessary things for their further journey, proving how God is able to care for us in the pathway of His will.

Hundreds of years before, and on an anxious day of a very different kind, a little child named Joash was saved by being hidden with his nurse in the temple buildings. For six years he was protected in the house of God and at the age of seven was proclaimed king. Having had a good start - as so many children have in Christian households - he did what was right all the time that he paid attention to those who served God. Believers, however young, are always in God 's house which being a "spiritual house" is more real than one of brick or stone. As long as we attend to what is due to Him whose house it is, we shall be in salvation. David longed to dwell there for

ever. Have you learned by heart his shepherd Psalm - number twenty-three?

J.C.Evershed