

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

[DIVINE INTERVENTIONS](#)

["HE ALSO WHO EATS ME"](#)

[DEATH FOR THE BELIEVER](#)

[THE CHILDREN'S WITNESS](#)

DIVINE INTERVENTIONS

Acts 2: 2-4; 16: 25-32; 27: 22-25, 37, 44

C.R.B. These scriptures refer to some of the divine interventions in the book of Acts in relation to the working out of the thoughts of God. Other scriptures could be referred to but these three may suffice to commence our inquiry. In connection with each of the divine interventions there are certain conditions which would be instructive as providing a moral basis or background in which God sovereignly intervenes. We are constantly needing divine intervention in blessing in many ways. As we seek help together we may gather some impression as to the conditions amongst us that the Lord would look for that would provide a moral basis for Him to come in in the blessing which He would have in mind. The feature of prayer seems to enter into each of the occasions in the book, and there are other features too. In the first chapter there is "continual prayer" (v 14) and the saints were together in a spiritual realm of things. Chapter 16 records the experience of the service of God being maintained in conditions which are adverse in an extreme way. Chapter 27 shows how God listens to the exercises of one man. He had certain companions, but it would seem that God was listening to one man who interceded. It is remarkable in chapter 1, as preceding the divine intervention in the coming in of the Spirit in chapter 2, that there was this condition of the disciples being together in this elevated sphere of things, where there is not only a reminder of persons who were sovereignly called as apostles, but of the work of God in securing the brethren of Jesus along with them.

C.F.D. You are emphasising a spiritual realm of things in this section. Luke, at the end of his gospel, leaves them in a Jewish setting, does he not? But here are you thinking of the mount of Olives and the upper chamber as relating to a fresh spiritual setting in which the Lord is going to proceed?

C.R.B. Yes. There seems to be a moral link between the mount of Olives and the upper chamber, which is directly related to heaven,

and it is connected with their seeing Jesus going up. Whilst they are left without detailed instructions as to what to do, as in this spiritual realm and in this attitude of dependence, the Spirit of God seems to emphasise the word "together". It provides conditions in which they can receive help as to how to proceed, in view of the coming in of the Spirit in chapter 2, which in one sense is the greatest divine intervention that is recorded in the book.

P.W.C. Do you think unity is evidenced here? "With one accord" involves that there is no element of dissension amongst them.

C.R.B. Yes. That is a very important matter. For us it would be related to "keep the unity of the Spirit", but at that time the Spirit had not yet come. There was the instinctive clinging together of persons who were affected by Jesus being glorified, so that all natural differences are held under control. It is a triumph of divine grace that the Spirit of God can so work with persons such as the brethren of Jesus, who had been found earlier amongst those who were criticising and are now amongst this company. There is a touch of majesty about the way the Spirit of God says "and with his brethren".

J.A.P. It was very right to look into heaven; but "why do ye stand looking into heaven?" The intervention here, added to other things which you said, was to unite them practically in the testimony down here, which is a great test, is it not?

C.R.B. Yes. It is in this sphere of things that we prove what it is to be truly united. There was no question of any divergence here, or anyone seeking a prominent place; they were together with one accord. It is the normal way in which we would be together. Yet we are all tested as to the working out of it.

J.A.P. Another has said that these conditions having been reached in our own dispensation would show that it is reachable.

C.R.B. It is remarkable evidence of the perfection of the handiwork of Christ Himself, that these persons, who had come under the direct influence of the Lord Jesus, were held together in this way although the Spirit had not yet come in. With the presence of the Spirit here, we have the power within us to be together with one accord.

R.C.H. It says that they were all praying. In the second scripture Paul says "believe on the Lord Jesus" and in the third scripture. "I believe God", which relates to confidence. Is there a unified confidence in God in these persons that gives them this unity?

C.R.B. Yes, that helps. This was a testing period when the Lord, whom they had relied upon, had left them and the Spirit had not yet come, and they are held together by their common attraction to Jesus. It was not a matter of continually gazing up into heaven but of working things out according to scripture (Old Testament scriptures in this case) in a way which would provide an area of things into which the Spirit could come, in liberty and feeling and power. Confidence in God, as you say, lies behind this.

G.H. It says "These gave themselves all with one accord to continual prayer, with several women", Acts 1: 14. Would that suggest a good state, an inward subject state amongst them?

C.R.B. Yes. It would stand related to verse 15, "the crowd of names who were together was about a hundred and twenty". There was a goodly number of persons who were held here in relation to what was of interest to God and in testimony in this scene. It was in the very midst of the city in which Christ had been condemned to death and outward conditions were adverse, and yet they are here as waiting upon God in this continual way. This whole dispensation is to be marked by dependence, which is related to entire confidence in God.

C.F.D. They returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the mount of Olives. Jerusalem is taking on a new glow. Things are to proceed now in the light of all that the mount of Olives would suggest - what is in the mind of the Lord as to Jerusalem in the upper room so that immediately what was in view is the true idea of assembly conditions.

C.R.B. And this would be related to the Lord's word to them in Luke 24, that they were to preach "beginning at Jerusalem". This is the manifestation of the wonder of the infinite grace of God which characterises the whole of this dispensation, that in the very city

which so soon before had witnessed the crowd crying out for the crucifying of Jesus there were persons who were together in a spirit of waiting upon God with a view as to the glad tidings as to the Lord Jesus being proclaimed in that very city. But it is instructive, as we have been often reminded, that before the preaching begins, the assembly has to be functioning. There has to be the house before you can have the preaching. So that they do not immediately proceed with the commission entrusted to them in Luke 24 for they were told to "await the promise of the Father", Acts 1: 4. It is not exactly the Spirit they were promised; it is "the promise of the Father", as though they were to be conscious that they needed special grace from heaven before they could proceed to preach, but in fact it means the constitution of the assembly where persons can be brought who believe.

C.F.D. What you are saying is interesting. Do you think that in this area of things, the personnel being singled out the way it is, there is the evidence of spiritual sensitivity and instincts specially working? Do you feel that, while we know the Spirit had not come at this point, these are the things that are much needed in our localities? Mr Taylor said you can sometimes rely more on instinct than on knowledge (see Vol 96, p.108).

C.R.B. Yes. This divine intervention in the coming of the Spirit only took place on this occasion (there are not two pourings forth of the Spirit), but if we are to prove the power in the full way in which it was proved at this time we would be concerned that conditions amongst us in each locality may be sensitively in accord with these conditions, the full confidence and dependence that marked the brethren at this point.

C.F.D. You made reference to the fact that there are not two outpourings of the Spirit; maybe you would just say a word as to that.

C.R.B. In chapter 10, when Peter was preaching to Cornelius, it says in verse 44 that "the Spirit fell upon all those who were hearing the word". But that was not a second pouring out of the Spirit. The Spirit was here and was moving in accordance with the conditions

that were established in chapter 2. The subsequent movements of the Spirit are all related to that. It was the extension to the gentiles in a full way of the matters that were set on at Pentecost. What would you say yourself?

C.F.D. Prefigured in the prodigal, as he returned the father fell upon his neck. Any falling of the Spirit, any activity of the Spirit in this dispensation now that He has come, would be a horizontal idea.

C.R.B. It is related to what was constituted here in the assembly. The assembly, as we have been instructed, was raised from the grave with Jesus by the surpassing power of God, and was thus in the mind of God brought into existence, but this is the assembly functioning in relation to the Spirit here, and that continues. One of the great wonders of this dispensation is the Spirit of God coming here; God in the Spirit here while Christ is on high.

D.T.H. In John 14 where the Lord says "I will beg the Father, and he will give you another Comforter" (v 16), is that referring to this time or is that referring to the reception by each of us individually when we receive the Spirit?

C.R.B. I rather thought it was connected with this time. In Acts 1 and Luke 24 the Lord refers to the Spirit coming as the promise of the Father, so that both the Father and the Lord are related to it. What had you thought yourself?

D.T.H. So the 'you' there refers to those who were gathered at that time.

C.R.B. It is the confirmation in John's gospel, which was written later, that, despite all the breakdown that had come in, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was directly related to the Lord committing things to the company that was gathered round Him in John 14. They were a trustworthy company and He gave the Spirit to them as those who were morally prepared for the reception of the Spirit.

J.A.P. The matter of divine intervention is current because some have set aside the manifestation of the glory of the Lord in difficult times. Certainly this was a very difficult time in the very city where

the Lord had been slain and crucified, yet the Lord was still acting. I believe the enemy is very active in this matter, trying to set aside the right of the Lord to manifest His glory even in difficult times, and when perhaps the brethren are ignorant and erring.

C.R.B. Yes. We look for and experience the Lord's intervention as He makes Himself known in the breaking of bread and all that proceeds out of that. As He is "in the midst" (John 20: 19) He is in supreme control of all that proceeds in all the local assemblies, for it is "in the midst of the assembly", Heb 2: 12. Along with that, we are constantly needing the Lord's intervention as to many matters, and having to wait for it in certain matters. Often we are cast upon God for divine intervention in relation to matters in our lives and our households and many other matters, but peculiarly in relation to the prosperity of the saints assembly-wise. There is instruction in the way these experiences in the Acts are related to conditions which we would seek to find amongst us at the present time.

R.C.H. So while Paul and Silas were praying to God for intervention, in the meantime in praying to God there was praise. Would it be their instinctive occupation?

C.R.B. Yes. In chapter 16, praising God is, as you say, instinctively flowing out of the prayer. It is "in praying". The conditions there were adverse in the extreme. We have not experienced things like that - scourged with many stripes and cast into the inner prison. But divine timing is related to this and indeed to all the interventions in this book. All divine interventions are related to the perfection of divine timing. There had been a certain period of waiting. It was at midnight that this proceeded. And God waited until the jailor had fallen asleep, and until Paul and Silas were liberated in praising God, and then He brings in this earthquake, but it is related to two men who were in the inner prison and were praying and praising God.

R.C.H. That is interesting, because when Paul discoursed it was "till midnight" (Acts 20: 7) and, whether it was at that time or not, it says they brought Eutychus away alive, and they broke bread.

C.R.B. There are a number of references in Scripture to midnight, or the middle of the night. They relate to the time when the frailty of the flesh is known and God comes in in surpassing power in a most unexpected way. Paul and Silas would be praying in relation to the conditions in which they were, but then in praising they would be lifted above those circumstances. These were the conditions in which not only were these two men liberated but the jailor was converted and all the prisoners released. This was the beginning of the spreading of the gospel and the truth of the assembly into Europe, and it flows out of two men in adverse conditions praying and praising, and God intervening in His own time. Chapter 16 is a special example of the inscrutable perfection of divine timing.

J.A.P. It certainly tests me. In the first book of Psalms the spirit of Christ waited for the intervention of God. Much could be said as to that; the psalmist said, "As for me, I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications", Ps 31: 22. We are tested in these matters that you speak of. Will God come in? He may not come in in the way I think, but it is a real exercise to go through.

C R.B. We might receive some impression from this scripture of what it meant to these men. Paul had had a vision. It is not that we would expect anybody to have a vision in these days. Mr Taylor said 'I do not know of anyone in modern times who has had a vision at all'. He added that he would be afraid of it if he heard any had visions now (see Vol 78, pp. 279- 281). But this was a vision in relation to the gospel coming into Europe. "A certain Macedonian man" was seen in the vision (Acts 16: 9), but when they arrived at Philippi there was no man, although there were the women praying. And then, instead of the whole city being swept with power from God, a spirit of Python comes to light and it was so for "many days". There was no sign of any intervention by God and they had to wait until the most adverse circumstances were experienced by these two men. It is a witness to the power of God that He chose to intervene in grace at midnight when everything around seemed most adverse.

G.H. It says "who, having received such a charge, cast them into the inner prison and secured their feet to the stocks". You can see how the enemy was against the spreading of the glad tidings. It speaks about the feet announcing glad tidings (see Rom 10: 15).

C.R.B. Announcing glad tidings of peace. The enemy did his worst. What were these two beloved men praying about? They were surrounded by prisoners. It was the inner prison they were in, but clearly there were many other prisoners, and God was able to release not only these two men but all the prisoners. Sometimes we may need our faith strengthening that God can bring in a great earthquake. We think of persons in prison at the present time; maybe an earthquake is needed, not an earthquake that causes any loss of life but one that frees persons from their bondage and liberates them in relation to the light.

G.H. Yes. It says "and the prisoners listened to them". Would that bring out the moral weight of these two men?

C.R.B. Yes. It is remarkable that the Spirit of God seems to stress that the prisoners were all awake listening but the jailer had fallen asleep. He had done all that was necessary and was leaving the matter. He did not realise that God was working in that prison. When Peter was in prison it was just one man who was taken out for that was what God intended to do at that time. But God here had in mind the jailer and He caused all the prisoners to listen.

G.H. Yes; prisoners can be very hard, but these listened.

C.R.B. Maybe the Spirit of God would strengthen us in faith as to persons groaning under the authority of darkness and in prison in varied ways. Perhaps we cannot see how God can intervene. Paul and Silas did not know how God was going to intervene and yet in praying their confidence in God was such that they began to praise Him with singing. What a thing to listen to: men who had confidence in God. God chose that moment to come in in a power that set everybody free.

J.A.P. In this subject of intervention, God's ways are not our ways, are they? What you said is very instructive, that coming to Philippi

Paul would have been very tested that some of the things which he would have looked for were not there, but the Spirit of God took him another way. A woman had her heart opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul, and then this earthquake. It is very instructive, is it not?

C.R.B. We find that by experience. We have a word from God as to a certain matter and we immediately tend to look for confirmation in circumstances as to the working out of things, but God very often does not give us circumstances to confirm it. He tests us as to whether we really believe what He says. It is poor ground if we have to look for circumstances. Our confirmation should be in God. Our guidance is from God. Sometimes God may allow circumstances to be favourable to confirm, but oftentimes they are very unfavourable. We are tested whether we really believe God. Thus with these men; they had nothing to confirm them at all and everything was adverse, and yet they fully believed that God was going to fulfil His own word in His own time.

J.A.P. It is very testing, especially to those who serve. They go out, and all of a sudden the enemy unleashes something; so if you looked at it from a providential point of view you would say that is not confirmation. But that is not God's way at all.

C.R.B. No. God will always see us through. He often allows us to be tested as to whether we believe through the circumstances or whether we believe Him.

J.A.P. What you are saying is for the help of all of us, but I know I have often failed in this; I am watching God's providences more than His word. Even a great servant like Abraham, when the famine came, went down into Egypt (see Gen 12: 10); He followed what appeared to be a right providential course and so did Isaac. Would that help at all?

C.R.B. Yes. As to Isaac, God prevented him from going so far. He stopped him in the land of Gerar and told him not to go into Egypt, (see Gen 26: 1,2). When Abraham came back he came to the altar he had built in the first place. He went back to his own personal links

with God. There is a great line of instruction in Genesis, how men built altars without any commandment; commandment comes in Exodus. Men built altars, and Abraham was brought back to his first impressions with God when Jehovah appeared to him. If we are diverted by circumstances and allow ourselves to go on a certain course, when we receive light as to that we return to where we were in relation to God. God always continues where we left off. Abraham is able to continue from where he had arrived in his relation to God. That is a great comfort when you think of persons who have been diverted and lost valuable months or years. When the work of God in them is re-quickened they begin afresh where they were in their soul experience and knowledge of God.

P.W.C. The circumstances may bring us back to where we were the first time. God does not always take us the way we think He should, but if we go His way He will bring us right through.

C.R.B. That is most important. We always find by experience that when God in His goodness has called us to go a way that we did not really want to go, we realise, when circumstances become more complicated, that God's way was the best way and that our way would not have been so fruitful for Him, although it might have been more pleasant for us.

C.F.D. Assurance marked these men - you were speaking about dependence upon God and confidence in Him - they had concluded "that the Lord had called us to announce to them the glad tidings", Acts 16: 10. Paul seemed to have an understanding with the Lord as to the direction that the testimony was taking, so while in these circumstances there is no appearance of their being shaken at all. Their confidence and their knowledge of divine Persons was their stay and it looks as if they were completely superior to the circumstances of the moment, and you might say speaking guardedly, made a channel into which the Lord could easily come.

C.R.B. It is interesting that in verse 6 it refers to "being forbidden by the Holy Spirit" and in verse 7 "the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them". When Paul writes to the beloved brethren at Philippi he

refers to "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ", chap 1: 19. It would be "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" that sustained these two men in the prison. It helped them to wait in patience until God intervened. Sometimes we receive a word from God and may have some impression of how the Lord would have things and yet we wait a long time, and perhaps our faith begins to be a little tested; we become concerned as to whether God really is going to work things out in the way He indicated. The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ would help us to wait in increasing faith and expectancy that God always is as good as His word.

J.A.P. In that section in Philippians there were other brethren preaching and Paul said they were not preaching "purely", but still he said he rejoiced because Christ was announced. So that things might not, as you say, go the way that we think and God may use others too, but we have to leave that with God and rejoice that Christ is announced. Is that part of the "supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ"?

C.R.B. Yes. It relates to a man whose whole interests are bound up personally with Christ in the glory. He says "Christ shall be magnified in my body whether by life or by death", Phil 1: 20. There is a man who rejoices if Christ is magnified, even if, as you say, it is preaching through contention. As long as it is preaching Christ, God can use it.

C.F.D. "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here and each being loosed. You might say that the very way in which God was moving in those circumstances was a clear indication as to how the outshining of the glad tidings, the gospel, the liberation of men, was to affect the whole Japheth movement. In Noah's prophecy Japheth means 'spreading'. There came a time when the testimony spread into Europe, and this is how things were coming into that area. So that the Japheth period is just breaking here, so to speak. God is showing under these extreme conditions just how He is going to move in the outshining of the glad tidings, is He not?

C.R.B. It is the spreading of the truth as to Christ and the assembly into the Western world. The commencement of the testimony to the whole Western world is related to the fact that two men stood firm in their faith in God in a time of pressure. When they are released they immediately begin to refer to the authority of the Lord Himself. In this setting it is "the word of the Lord" - it is "the word of God" elsewhere. The whole principle of discipleship is brought into view so that persons become subject to the truth and to what the Lord had in mind in intervention. God works by way of an earthquake more than we realise.

G.H. "And suddenly there was a great earthquake". That would have a dispensational setting, at the time of the Reformation and so on, but you have something more to say at the present time as to this matter of an earthquake, the foundations shaken, the doors being opened, etc.

C.R.B. I do not think Paul and Silas would have been unsympathetic with the prisoners that surrounded them. We would seek to receive some impression of how God feels it that persons are in prison. These prisoners were perhaps all unbelievers, but we know believers who are in bondage at the moment, bound under authority of one sort or another. In our intercession we may need to have increasing confidence that God, in His own timing and His own way, will in some way act by way of an earthquake to affect what appears to be stable but is not of God. He would cause things that appear to be stable to be shaken so that persons are shaken to their roots and they return to the God who is waiting to bless them. This might have a very extended bearing and strengthen us in our intercession and our expectation of God coming in. It is the authority of darkness that is holding many persons and we rely upon the Father to translate them into the kingdom of the Son of His love (see Col 1: 13).

C.F.D. With regard to what you have been saying about two men as standing for things, and what God is able to do in opening up the whole sphere of testimony, do you relate that in any way to the idea of two in a locality, such as we have in Matthew 18?

C.R.B. Are you thinking that it is two assembly-minded persons in Matthew 18 - "two of you"?

C.F.D. "If two of you shall agree on the earth concerning any matter, whatsoever it may be that they shall ask, it shall come to them from my Father who is in the heavens. For where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them" (vv 19, 20). We have been helped to see as to that section that it is assembly-minded persons, persons who might be characteristically in a place supportive of all that the Lord is proceeding with. Would you look in our day of small things which that scripture looks on to, that where two such are in a place the Lord can do just as much as He did when Paul and Silas were in the prison.

C.R.B. The power is unabated, and it would help if we were strengthened of the Spirit to pray increasingly in line with what God Himself has in mind to do. Paul's exercises would all have been related to the Macedonian man and that that man had not appeared. Women had appeared; Lydia is a most valuable person in inviting Paul into her house, and he went there; it was a remarkable service for a sister. But he would be looking, through all this experience during these many days, for the fulfilment of what he had seen in the vision, a Macedonian man. If we were actuated by that desire and took on something of the spirit of Hannah of old in praying for a man child and for true features of manhood to be liberated for God in every locality, maybe we would see this great earthquake.

C.F.D. That is a real word of encouragement and stimulation.

R.C.H. Do you think that would have been what they were praying about here, that there might be a greater yield of praise for God? In the epistle it speaks about singing ... with your heart to the Lord", Eph 5: 19. Here it was an audible thing and, as you said, they must have been sympathetic with other prisoners and sympathetic with God too.

C.R.B. Yes, it is the service of God that is in view. They were filling it out themselves. You might connect this with various experiences we might have during an assembly week, but these are men whose

hearts are lifted up above their circumstances in relation to what is for God. There would be a direct link, I think, with the mount of Olives in this. They were transported in their spirits from the inner prison to the mount of Olives, praising God, but what they had in view was that the service of God might be strengthened in Philippi as a place. And that would be the foremost thing in our prayers, if we are with God. We shall be praying for persons to be liberated to have part in the service of God at the present time. We would not overlook other interventions of God in the book, such as with Saul of Tarsus in chapter 9 and others, but it seems a very affecting experience in chapter 27. Paul had had to warn them that there might be loss of life, but now, as a result of his intercession with God, the word comes to him: "God has granted to thee all those that sail with thee". We may all feel the need of being strengthened to intercede with God according to God's own mind. Here is a man who is interceding with God and God grants to him all those that were sailing with him. This is a divine intervention in a setting of public breakdown so that, when the ship itself ceased to be usable, all the persons got safe to land. The Spirit of God would strengthen us to be praying like Paul that persons might get safe to land, that they might find that the reality of the enjoyment of the assembly is still available in the Spirit's power despite the public breakdown that has come in.

J.A.P. In Genesis you get the thought of souls. In Acts 7 it speaks of seventy souls, in the ark eight souls, and in the conflict where Abraham secured his brother, someone wanted the souls. That is your thought here. Paul was concerned about the souls, that is the affections, what a brother is; the souls are the point.

C.R.B. We are brought into some understanding of souls in this way as we have some impression of what God has in mind when He says "my soul". The references in Scripture to God's soul would affect us so that we begin to value the souls of persons in some sense in the way that God looks on them.

J.A.P. "We were in the ship, all the souls, two hundred and seventy-six", Acts 27: 37. They were counted.

C.R.B. Yes. It is similar to John 21, a hundred and fifty-three - all great fishes. We might have said about two hundred and seventy, but Luke says "two hundred and seventy-six". Every individual soul is of infinite value to God, for the purchase price is the blood of Jesus.

G.H. You say 'God's soul': would that be God's feelings?

C.R.B. I think so. I suppose the outstanding reference that is brought forward in the New Testament is in Matthew 12: 18, "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul has found its delight". In Heb 10: 38, in relation to anyone drawing back, He says "my soul does not take pleasure in him". These and other references bring out the depths of the feelings of God and what He delights in and what He does not delight in.

G.H. Think of the Lord Jesus saying "Now is my soul troubled", John 12: 27.

C.F.D. What is again shining out here is the servant's own peculiar link with God. There were two men in our previous chapter, but this is one man, and he said to them "be of good courage" and "I believe God". There is no question in the way Paul was taking the initiative at this point, but what was shining out and coming through was that, as he was proceeding, things were really proceeding from God through the apostle, were they not?

C.R.B. Yes. This would be Paul as a characteristic overcomer. The promise is to the overcomer in each of the seven assemblies; in two or three they are very instructive in their scope of things. Paul would shine out as an overcomer in adverse conditions. As you go through this chapter you almost feel you are alongside Paul with things becoming more and more difficult. If you look up the map you will see the way the boat zig-zagged and was heading for disaster but God in His providence redirected things and they got through to this island in the end - a remarkable intervention of God providentially. Paul was not trusting in God's providence, he was trusting in God and God's word to him. So an overcomer does not depend upon

encouraging or favourable circumstances but for what is right, cost what it may, because he knows God.

C.F.D. Earlier on in the chapter he spoke to the men who were in charge of the boat but they would not listen to him. He had the word then. Might it be in our own time that Paul's word is brought forward but there might be a period of time when that word is not carrying its weight with persons as it should? Eventually what comes in from God will be according to His word through the apostle.

C.R.B. Yes and there may be a period of waiting whilst the servant is tested as to intercession with God, and maybe the brethren are tested as to whether they are prepared to receive the word from God.

C.F.D. And therefore God's timetable, which you referred to before, is extremely important. Would patience, prayer and faith in our knowledge of God be a sustaining line as waiting God's time?

C.R.B. Quite so. In the Old Testament God often foretold things with minute accuracy. The death of Christ is foretold in Daniel 9 with precise accuracy to a year. The time, as the table at the beginning of our Bible shows, from Adam to the birth of Christ, was precisely four thousand years. Various periods are foretold exactly. It is very instructive to read as to periods such as four hundred and thirty years and four hundred and eighty years, but with the coming of the Spirit that ceased. We have no precise dates to work on now. We are expecting the rapture today. If the Lord leaves us here we may have some impression as to what God is doing, but we have no precise dates to work on. We are dependent upon help from the Spirit daily.

J.A.P. Another point is that the brother that gave the word here, Paul (the right word that Mr Dadd referred to), went through the circumstances himself, as did Elijah who prophesied the famine and went through it. He was not an onlooker watching the brethren going through difficulties but was there in an intercessory way as sharing in the very disaster they had brought on themselves.

C.R.B. Yes. And I do not think there is any indication in the Old Testament that Elijah knew when that period was going to cease. We are told in James that it was three years and six months and that he prayed that it should not rain, and then the rain came because he prayed again. He did not know how long it was going to last, as far as the record goes; he just had to go on day after day. Yet the time came when he discerned that the abundance of rain was about to be experienced. The feature of prayer shines out in Elijah in that peculiar way, more as recorded in the New Testament than in the Old. It is the prayer of a man who stood before God.

R.C.H. The Lord says "ye believe on God, believe also on me", John 14: 1. You referred to the Lord's word before to the jailor. What would you say about the Lord's present word to us?

C.R.B. The Lord's word in John 14 was at a time of acute crisis when Judas had just gone out and the warning as to Peter denying Him had just been given. There is the setting of things in which we believe on God as in supreme control over the universe, but along with that our faith has often been strengthened as to the way the Lord Jesus has direct personal control over matters in every assembly. Our faith needs to be strengthened sometimes in not only the power of Christ in a general way but in the detailed power that He has as the true Solomon to work things out according to God's own mind. So that in that sense "believe on me" would be a detailed matter in which the Spirit of God would specially strengthen us, so that we would have faith that all will get safe to land.

PLAINFIELD

23 November 1977

Key to initials

C.R.B. - C.R.Byng; P.W.C. - P,W,Coombes; C.F.D, - C.F.Dadd;
D.T.H. - D.T.Hawkins; G.H. - G.Hesterman; R.C.H. - R.C.Hesterman;

J.A.P. - J.A.Petersen, (All local except C.R.B. - London)

"HE ALSO WHO EATS ME"

A.J.E.Welch

John 6: 57

This verse just impressed me as we assembled, as presenting to us what we could speak of with reverence as a whole Christ. Previous verses refer to eating His flesh and drinking His blood, referring to His precious death and appropriating what enters into it but here it is "he also who eats me". The verse must often have impressed us as a most wonderful suggestion, that in the precious words of the Spirit of God in scripture, there should be a suggestion that we eat Christ. It refers to Him, as we know, as beyond death, glorious in His risen, ascended manhood, but it immediately brings the great extent of what is in Him as Man within the range of appropriation by us. This appeals to me as related to what we touched together on Lord's day, the way we are instructed in what is spiritual, involving the need to come into what is truly life. I sometimes feel the deadening influence of what is just religious form and such like things. Sometimes the matters that arise seem to press that in upon us, the lifelessness of a course which is just of a legal kind, giving us to feel the need of what is truly life. I just venture to suggest, dear brethren, the need of close attention to the appropriation of Christ in this sense. To understand it challenges our spirituality in the deepest way, and yet here we have a great spring of life which is according to God in the appropriation of Him.

What is in mind is that appropriation in this sense leads to formation; it leads to a constitution which is entirely of God; it leads to expansion in what we rightly speak of as the spiritual order of things. Very often we find, if we get to the Lord about matters, that any element of formation that is with us oftentimes springs in some sense from features of discipline. But this is not that; this is just the appropriation of Christ in His glory, a whole Christ, but appropriated by us so that what is in that Person as He is now in the glorious circumstances into which He has entered, enters in some sense into

ourselves and leads to something which is after the pattern that is set out in that glorious Person.

Well, we are challenged as to just how far we can move in the way of experience of this matter, but I believe the Lord would leave us this evening with just that point of challenge that we may move on and appropriate in the sense of what is here: "As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father". Think of the way that the Lord Jesus lived; it was in relation with the Father. And then He says "he also who eats me shall live also on account of me". This, dear brethren, is truly life, and what we have here is food, I suppose, of the most exalted kind. I know of no richer suggestion in Scripture as to food and nourishment than this verse, and I believe the Lord would impress it upon us, that we seek our way prayerfully and dependently into the appropriation of Christ in the glorious sense that is depicted here, that something might emerge among us in the sense of life and spiritual freshness and vigour that is according to His mind.

LONDON

24 January 1978

DEATH FOR THE BELIEVER

E.C.Burr

John 12: 27, 28

I think beloved, as was suggested in our brother's prayer at the beginning, that we all desire continually to have fresh impressions of Jesus. I suppose the consideration of Him in the gospels is one of the most blessed occupations that the believer may have, surpassed, if at all, by occupation with Him where He is, as our beloved brother has been saying. The consideration of Jesus in life in the world where He is is something that we cannot possibly exhaust. We all feel, I am sure, how little we have penetrated into the world where Jesus lives. Whatever impressions we have about the life of Jesus in incarnation from the gospels I think we feel

always that John has something special. Our brothers who have spoken have both drawn on this gospel this evening. We speak of particular presentations of Jesus in this gospel, His being in control, His dignity of movement, and many things like that. These things are not out of the other gospels, the blessed activity of Jesus in Matthew and Mark and Luke. Although He is taken in those gospels, yet His movements are under His own control through the gospels. He moves with dignity in those gospels, the glory of His movements as King in Matthew, the stability and, one might almost say, the solidity of the way in which even in chapter 5 He went up to the mountain and when He had sat down His disciples came to Him - the blessed dignity and stability of the movements of Jesus! You do not wonder that chapter 5 having begun like that, chapter 7 ends with the man who built his house on a rock. And Mark, with his characteristic immediacy of Jesus' movements, but never haste; the blessedness of Jesus in activity in that gospel. And in Luke the blessedness of the movements of a Man who seems to be able to linger time after time to unfold things in the truth in parables; chapter 15 following chapter 14 and going on to chapter 16 must have been a long period in which, as it were, Jesus stood still: and dwelling, as Luke does, from the birth of Jesus and then His movements in chapter 2 up to chapter 9, concentrating in a short space Jesus in activity, then expanding into fulness the dying of Jesus from chapter 9 to chapter 23. But these features are in John, and John is special - 'John's simple page' as it has been described. I suppose it is because John does not under the Spirit fill out his gospel with detail and with parables and with miracles that the Person of Jesus stands out in such distinctiveness in this gospel and we can follow Him. I believe it is true that John's gospel is the easiest gospel to have in outline in your mind because the movements of Jesus are so distinctive.

And we come to this occasion in chapter 12 corresponding no doubt to Gethsemane where that is referred to in the other gospels. But there is something about this reference to it which is apart from and distinct from the other gospels. There is no deep depression,

there is no sorrow and grief, there is no sweat as drops of blood. His soul is troubled "and what shall I say?", but the trouble only brings out the perfection of His manhood, not only bringing out His manhood, but bringing out its perfection, that His soul would be troubled as going into death. Here it is not contemplating death exactly as we have it in the other gospels as in relation to sin or sins, transgressions, or anything of that kind, but His soul troubled merely on account of the contemplation of death itself. It is the perfection of manhood which contemplates what it is to go into death in the perfection of manhood, quite apart from the question of sin and sins, but going into death in the perfection of Man. Think of the first Adam, what it must have been to him to be told that he would die, and what it was to him actually to see a man dead; these were things that were entirely new to Adam. He would have seen, no doubt, animals slain by God to provide coats of skin, but to see a man dead would be to Adam a new experience, something that he could not have conceived. Yet for One in the perfection of Jesus to contemplate going into death, Him in whom was life going into death, you do not wonder that He says "Now is my soul troubled", purely on account of going into death. We often speak of His death in John as relating to the burnt-offering, that in itself, in the way the offerings are divided up, not having to do with sins or sin or failure, but the perfection of an offering in going into death. So He contemplates death here as One who, in perfect manhood and in the perfection of the life that was in Him even in incarnation, is going into death - as Mr Darby says, to Him death was death. And it is contemplating death apart, as I say, from the question of sin and sins, although all those questions would be resolved in His death, but contemplating death as what it was in itself for man, and that in the perfection of manhood.

Then He says "But on account of this have I come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name". That is what He went into death for in this gospel, for the glory of the Father. It is not, I think, presented exactly as if it were for any other cause; it is for the glory of the Father He goes into death. It requires the perfection that was in Him to go into

death for the glory of the Father. And the Father responds immediately. It says "a voice out of heaven, I both have glorified and will glorify it again". No doubt the Father's name was glorified in His coming out of death, as the Father will be glorified in the appearing. (It is very interesting to see that the Father's glory was in the resurrection of Jesus and the Father's glory will be in the appearing of Jesus - "when he shall come in the glory of his Father", Mark 8: 38). Think how the glory of the Father extends, therefore, over the whole of the Christian period, all of it embraced in the glory of the Father. And that is what He went into death for, that the Father's name might be glorified.

I thought of this, beloved, because we are having a great deal to do with death, more to do with death currently than, I think, is within the memory of most of us. Maybe the circle is smaller than it has been and thus we are more familiar and know one another, and we, therefore, miss one another more as the Lord may take one and another, but even numerically we have had to do more with death than at any other time. And it just exercised me as to the capacity any of us has to approach death; what capacity have we to approach death? It has been said before, but it is true, that for all of us one day it will be either the rapture or to depart and be with Christ. It is quite inevitable that one day it will be that, either the rapture or to depart and be with Christ. But what is our state, beloved, in view of it? Because it must be one day either the one or the other. The rapture will be, we might even say, rapturous for us; we will be caught up to be with Him in the clouds and to be for ever with the Lord; but we may have to face death and how do we face it, beloved? Are we prepared in ourselves to face death? The fact that Jesus has been into death and has been into death in the way in which He is presented in the other gospels (that is in relation to every moral question being resolved for God) means that we are able to face death apart from those moral questions; that is, knowing that because He lives, all these moral questions are resolved. Therefore for the believer there should be the capacity to face death in something, I do not say in the fulness of it, but in something of the

way in which Jesus approached death in John 12. There would be trouble in the soul, because there is departure from an order of things which is well known, into an order of things which as to its actuality is unknown, and the soul might be troubled on that account. But to be able to approach death with the sense that what is involved in it is the glory of the Father is really the portion of the saint. That is the portion of the saint as contemplating death. I ask myself, but I ask my brethren too, are we prepared to face death on this high level, that to depart and be with Christ, if it is that, is but for us a fresh experience of the Father's name being glorified? It awaits the Father's word until we are raised, the Father's activity in relation to that, something to which, I suppose we might reverently say that Christ relates Himself in regard to the resurrection of the saints; but have we things so settled morally in us, beloved, that we can approach death ourselves and contemplate it on something of the basis in which Jesus approaches it here? The Lord does not allow so much death to occur without intending it to have some word to us at the present time. And the Lord does not bring death before us to make us sorrowful or sad. There is a natural sorrow and sadness which is not to be deprecated; certainly not. There is rightly a sorrow in regard to what is natural, but in what is spiritual there should be the power to approach death in the sense that for us it is apart from sin, He having resolved all those questions. There is no doubt that we cannot approach it in the same way as Jesus did, because He approached it in a body in which sin was not, in which He knew no sin, and in which He did no sin. We have bodies in which all these things have taken place, which at various times we have used for that very purpose, yet His own work delivers us from it and gives us power to approach death in some sense of what the burnt-offering is. Beloved, the Lord would just encourage us to see whether morally, spiritually, in our own souls, we have arrived at this ground. For all of us, I might say, being here tonight, there is time to take something of this ground. In Leviticus 1 it is "when any man... presenteth an offering", and that offering is the burnt-offering. There, therefore, seems to me in that scripture to be the capacity, not only to bring Christ as an offering to God, but even in ourselves to have some

sense that the questions which all the other offerings involve having been resolved, we ourselves then have the capacity to contemplate death, with no doubt an element of trouble of soul, but with the sense that the object in it is "Father, glorify thy name".

Well, beloved, I do not think these things are too high for us. I think we often approach death with its necessary sorrow in the sense of the grief and all that is involved in it naturally, but for the believer there is a higher tone, to be able to approach it with those questions apart. And the Lord might even use our current occupation with death, for we have had to be occupied with it today, and tomorrow we shall be occupied with it. Who knows what we might be occupied with the day after that? The Lord knows, we do not know. But we could all be prepared, beloved, to contemplate approaching death in something - I do not set us alongside Jesus in this matter, save that He has left us a model that we should follow in His steps - something of the sense of what deliverance from every moral issue involves for us, so that we have some sense that death is but to give the Father a fresh occasion to glorify His name.

LONDON

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THE CHILDREN'S WITNESS

In the days of Elisha the eyes of a young man, his servant, were opened by God in answer to the prophet's prayer. Actually he was already able to use his ordinary sight - and what he had seen made him full of fear. There was a great host of enemies around his master and himself! However, given the eyes of faith, he was able to see that the powers of protection, horses and chariots of fire, were stronger than the enemies. The word of the prophet was "Fear not, for they that are with us are more than they that are with them!" This is what is meant when we speak of God's testimony, or witness, in this world having all the resources that it needs. These resources

are unseen to the human eye but depend on the presence here of the Holy Spirit of God.

This lesson is one that we are slow to learn. It may seem to us, for instance, that all hopes of spreading the truth were lost in the times of the martyrs. Yet it was they who were really the victors and indeed were more than conquerors through Him that loved them. Their enemies could do nothing further against them now that they were with Christ which is very much better. Moreover all God's power remained to bless their- witness. As an example, the words of Stephen at his stoning no doubt prepared the conscience of Saul of Tarsus to bow to the will of the Lord Jesus, with untold gain to the Christian testimony. Hundreds of years later a martyr, looking at the crowd around, exclaimed 'Behold the harvest! O Master, send forth Thy labourers!'

On some of the ancient tombs of Christians in Rome there is a picture-sign of a fish. You can easily draw one with only two curved lines from a point, crossing them towards the tail and adding a dot for an eye. The sign is explained by the fact that in the language of the New Testament the letters of the word for 'fish' are the first letters of the words for 'Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour'. In ways like this even quite young persons who have died still speak a glorious message and their faithful witness goes on through the centuries. Do we who live let our light so shine that persons around may glorify our Father who is in the heavens?

J.C.Evershed

