

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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SACRIFICE AND SERVICE

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W.D. It is in mind to look at the sacrificial basis of service. Service in the Scriptures is undoubtedly a great divine thought. We could find abundant verification of that in the scripture we commenced our season with in regard to the Hebrew bondman. It is of interest that when God was operating to extricate His people from Egypt He said "Let my people go, that they may serve me", Exod 8: 1. He did not just say "Let my people go". Being His people He had every right to say "Let my people go" but He said "Let my people go, that they may serve me". So we commence our enquiry with such thoughts in our minds, that it has the divine stamp and yet it has to be carried on in a sacrificial spirit. Romans 12 would give us that initial matter of the fruit of the gospel into which all may come, opening the door wide for every expression of committal, that word that has come so forcibly into our meetings - committal. Then in 2 Corinthians as to the service of the ministry, and in Acts 20 the service of shepherding the assembly of God.

P.G. Exodus 4 says "Let my son go, that he may serve me" (v 23). You were quoting "Let my people go, that they may serve me".

W.D. Do you mean that the divine relationship was in mind?

P.G. Yes, God desires to be served and He desires the service of sons.

W.D. Exactly. That would refer to His holy service in the sanctuary, would it not?

P.G. Yes, that is so.

J.F. Would you say something about the "compassions of God" to help us.

W.D. Would it be a reference to chapter 5 verse 8: "but God commends his love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us"?

J.F. It would indeed. If we get that into our souls we have something to work on I believe, because we get everything from God in the way He has done things. It is "by the compassions of God".

W.D. That scripture, of course, would not cover it all, but at least it draws attention to how the gospel was expressed - "being still sinners, Christ has died for us".

D.M. Is the import of "Let my people go, that they may serve me" that there is no altar in Egypt?

W.D. That is right, it had to be in the wilderness, as God said, three days journey. I quoted the scripture not so much as having in mind its development but just to show that God puts a stamp, so to speak, on that thought.

D.M. It comes alongside of "be not conformed to this world". It stands over against that, does it not?

W.D. Which was Egypt, yes.

R.S.R. Paul says to the Corinthians "Ye are not your own for ye have been bought with a price", 1 Cor 6: 20. Do you think the intelligent believer would have some understanding of that and present his body on the altar consequent upon it?

W.D. I think that is right. "Bought with a price" would include the sacrificial side in keeping with the many other scriptures we have touched where something was given sacrificially and it would lead up in our affections to this great matter.

J.R. Somebody mentioned this morning the idea of a landmark. Do you think this verse 1 of Romans 12 would be a landmark in the believer's history when this definitely takes place?

W.D. It would, and do you not think that it is a landmark to which the Spirit of God may have constantly to bring us back?

J.R. It is something that is done irrevocably, once for all, and the believer who does this would be concerned to maintain it, and the Spirit would help him to maintain this outlook, would He not?

W.D. That is right - a landmark as real in the life of a believer as his conversion.

J.R. You referred to the result of the glad tidings. The immediate result would be the benefits that the believer receives. This is the response on his part to God, do you think?

W.D. Yes. It seems that with every believer who has been affected by the glad tidings there is created by the Spirit a desire to serve God, but the Spirit here raises the matter to the level of an intelligent service. What would be involved in an intelligent service? Much service goes on in the world; people devote themselves to good works, even under the name of Christianity, and to many activities. What would the expression "intelligent service" cover?

J.R. Is it a priestly act? The priest of old presented; a man presented his offering and the priest had a part in that. Would intelligence involve what is suitable to God?

W.D. Yes, and would involve our having acquired some understanding of the revelation of God and how wondrously He has moved, some understanding of the incarnation and of the death of Christ, showing that such divine movements are worthy of this sacrificial act.

A.C.C-m. The word 'holy' comes in - "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God". It would imply that the believer has left the world, judged the world and the things of the world, and realises that if he is going to serve God he must be holy. Would that be right?

W.D. Yes. Unholiness would militate against this irrevocable committal that is made. While it cannot be withdrawn it would sully the brightness of it. Is that what you have in mind?

A.C.C-m. If he was converted he would begin to wash his robes and judge the things of the world. If he had a television in the house he would say, I cannot serve God and present my body with that thing there. It is practical, is it not - priestly but practical?

W.D. And it comes out also in a simple way as well (though I am very tested by what I am going to say); it delivers a believer from

selfishness. When the gospel brings a person to that point I would say his body is a living sacrifice.

J.R. Is that how the believer becomes a sanctified vessel?

W.D. Yes - "holy". Verse 1 of Romans 12 is really on the road to 2 Timothy.

J.R. He is set apart for divine purposes.

D.L.S. In Exodus 21 the bondman came in alone, he came in with his body. You feel that that is the way the Lord held His body, for the will of God, in perfection. That is meant to affect us in some degree, that we should be like that.

W.D. We may not have money or status or place in this world but every believer has a body, a body indwelt by the Spirit of God, and the great test of his answer to the glad tidings is how he uses that body.

D.L.S. The greatest possibilities are connected with delivering our bodies.

H.B. When Mary said to the angel "Behold the bondmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1: 38), was not that the filling out of this?

W.D. Yes, she gave herself wholly over, presented herself in that way as a living sacrifice.

H.B. It was a matter of her body. Elsewhere she says "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour" (v 47). So she was totally preserved, was she not, spirit, soul and body?

W.D. That is very good.

R.S.R. You have more to say about being delivered from selfishness.

W.D. It is one of the triumphs of the gospel, particularly in a world such as we are in to -day. One aspect of the testimony would be that there are people of God here, affected by the gospel, and their course of life is totally different from the selfish trend in the labour

world, in the political world, in every sphere of life; they are persons who present their bodies a living sacrifice.

R.S.R. That is very good. So is this the answer to chapter 3 where every member - feet and so on - is awry, but now they are all dedicated and committed to God?

W.D. Yes. I think what you say is good because the instinct to serve seems to rise to the surface in a person immediately he is converted. You see the instinct of service operating in young people. One might say, I have no gift; but this chapter seems to open up something as to the diversity of the sacrifice that a believer can make.

S.Y. Is there any suggestion as to the blood of the ram of consecration in Leviticus? I am thinking of Mr Renton's reference to what is priestly. It says "And Moses took of its blood, and put it on the tip of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the great toe of his right foot" (chap 8: 23), and the same had to be done to his sons.

W.D. Is your point that every activity of the body in that way was under the divine claim, the blood representing the divine claim, and the body moved, activated itself, under that claim? And would not the blood remind them of what was sacrificial, securing them in that way?

J.R. And was the oil not put on as well as the blood? (see Lev 11: 25-28).

W.D. Which brings in, does it not, the power, not the act but the power behind the act?

M.B.T. The dispensation began with that. It says in Acts 1 "These gave themselves all with one accord" (v 14). "Gave themselves" is a sacrificial idea, is it not?

W.D. Yes, and the testimony prospered on account of that.

A.McK. In Psalm 118 it says "bind the sacrifice with cords, - up to the horns of the altar" (v 27) as if there was another victim ready when the sacrifice had taken place.

W.D. Is your point that the line is maintained?

A.McK. That is right. As we know, Romans 12 follows upon Romans 8 where you get the body acted on by the Spirit.

W.D. Yes, and the anointing, as has been referred to, is the power for this; and while it is an act as real as our conversion, it calls for a sense of waiting upon God daily as to where that body can be used. "The foot" was mentioned - the direction in which you move.

C.C.I. Did Paul himself set this out in his service in preaching? In chapter 15 of Romans he says "for me to be minister of Christ Jesus to the nations, carrying on as a sacrificial service the message of glad tidings of God, in order that the offering up of the nations might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (v 16). Not only was it seen in Paul but the results would be seen in this committal you refer to in chapter 12.

W.D. They would, and it should affect us here this afternoon that we were in that offering that he offered up - we of the nations were that offering that Paul offered up as a sacrificial service and he said it was "sanctified by the Holy Spirit" as if the divine pleasure, the sanctifying act of the Holy Spirit, stood related to that sacrificial service that Paul carried on.

W.L. Paul uses a remarkable expression in regard to the brethren in Macedonia: "they gave themselves first to the Lord, and to us" (2 Cor 8: 5). He says they even went "beyond their power" (v 3).

W.D. Yes, and in that way the testimony spread through Europe in virtue of that. What would be your thought as to "be not conformed to this world"?

W.L. It would involve the exercises of the earlier chapters of the book where member by member you have to learn to dissociate yourself from all that is offensive to God.

J.N. Had you anything further to say in relation to presenting your bodies a living sacrifice? It goes on to say, "which is your intelligent service".

W.D. Just that I feel that we should not allow the pressure of what is circumstantial in our lives to deprive us of the constant, sober consideration in the presence of God as to whether our committal as a living sacrifice is being maintained in the light of the compassions of God.

J.N. I think that is very good. Does Paul confirm that in 1 Corinthians 10? Before he presents the cup of blessing he says "I speak as to intelligent persons" (v 15).

W.D. Yes; and while the thought of the intelligence and the mind is stressed in this passage, it obviously means the mind in relation to the affections being engaged with the compassions of God.

D.R. What would you say as to the word 'renewing' - "the renewing of your mind"?

W.D. It is the same mind. You do not get a new mind, but under the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit your mind is renewed, it is put in a different direction. "For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit life and peace", Rom 8: 6.

D.R. That is helpful. I think Mr Darby said that he was always conscious that his mind naturally was infidel. There is nothing more dark than the human mind naturally, so there is a constant need for this renewal, is there not?

W.D. It speaks elsewhere of the "renewal of the Holy Spirit", Tit 3: 5. It means that the mind is constantly directed in that fresh direction of things because conformity to the world could come through your mind, could it not?

D.R. I am sure of that. Do you think that the renewing would take place as we keep our minds in touch with divine Persons and divine things?

W.D. I think it involves the daily exercise which should never be neglected by any believer, that is the Scriptures, prayer, communion with divine Persons, constant intercourse with the Spirit. The private side of a believer's life has to be nurtured in spiritual things if he is going to have the experience of the renewal of his mind.

C.A.G. Would it be exemplified in Philippians 2, "For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (v 5)? Is that not the summation of it?

W.D. You get the same suggestion there.

J.M-r. Does the vow of the Nazarite in Numbers 6 bear upon this, following as it does upon the trial of jealousy in chapter 5 of that book? As taken on the trial of jealousy would find its response with us in the special vow of the Nazarite?

W.D. What you say is interesting. I noticed that Mr Darby said that no person can serve the Lord in any degree unless the principle of Nazariteship enters into his life. You are asked to preach and it raises a challenge in accepting the service, whether privately the principle of Nazariteship has been accepted.

J.M-r. So you drew attention yesterday to chapter 7 and the princeliness of the giving there which would follow upon the vow of the Nazarite.

R.S.R. The unshaved head of the Nazarite would be an outward evidence that he is not conformed to the world.

W.D. Exactly, and freedom from strong drink and what would excite the flesh was all part of his consecration.

A.C.C. Is it not one of the privileges of the Christian dispensation that you offer your body a living sacrifice? The sacrifices of old were not living sacrifices, but now it is the opportunity and privilege of us all to be on this line.

W.D. That is good, and the encouragement of the young Christian should be that there is something in what he does that relates to what Christ was, what He was for the Father here.

A.C.C. I wondered if the Supper did not provide a renewal for our minds each Lord's day, because that is a question of the mind, is it not? It is for a calling of Him to mind. That supreme sacrifice before us would encourage us to maintain the first committal.

W.D. The Supper would be the centre of that wide area of spiritual activity that has to be drawn upon in order that the mind may be renewed constantly in this direction.

A.J.G. I am thinking of the wonderful simplicity of this; it is not putting it on a high level of service exactly, not saying that you are to do this or do that. It is rather like Paul when he immediately says "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22: 10) as though his intelligent service is to present his body, and this would include every Christian. The young people are not asked to do something beyond their power but just to present their bodies.

W.D. And they are doing it, not only in this city but elsewhere we have for instance young people who visit elderly brethren, and caring for them, imparting spiritual impressions to them. Do you not think in the light of what you have said that there is the fragrance of a spiritual sacrifice in an act of that nature?

A.J.G. Very good. God does not put these things outside of our grasp but in a way that the whole life of Christ would be an example for us, One who we may say with reverence presented His body wholly?

R.S. Is it interesting too that the first reference to service in this epistle is in chapter 1 where Paul says "For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the glad tidings of his Son" (v 9)? The highest part of the believer is his spirit according to the scriptural expression "spirit, and soul, and body", 1 Thess 5: 23. Paul delineated something, and we are thankful that it is set out in a person of like passions to ourselves and can be arrived at. "The glad tidings of his Son": there is a sacrificial touch in that too, is there not?

W.D. There is, "his Son" speaking of how the Father's affections have been drawn out in relation to the matter.

A.A.B-n. This would lead to the 'proving' of the will of God and what is sacrificial - "that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God".

W.D. It points out the blessedness of that path. A path of selfishness leads nowhere but to disappointment and frustration, and yet in this pathway of the body committed as a living sacrifice in relation to the will of God you prove something in the power of the Spirit. I think the reference later in the epistle to the thought of peace - "And the God of peace be with you all" (chap 15: 33) - is an allusion to the peace that takes possession of a believer as he is here in relation to the will of God. Would you say that ?

A.A.B-n. Yes, that is helpful. It is something that is to be experienced in the proving of it. Paul would present it to them to bring them into this - "the renewing of your mind" and then the proving of the will of God. Do you think that would lead to intelligent sacrificial service by us?

W.D. Yes it would; and the way in which the apostle uses the words "good and acceptable and perfect will of God" is as if he enlarges on it so to speak, as much as to say, you could not make a mistake. A young person may say, There is my livelihood with many prospects and if I put my body on the altar as a living sacrifice I may have to face matters which will test me. But the apostle says "good and acceptable and perfect will of God".

R.S.R. Would this lead on to chapter 15: "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that ye should abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (v 13)? There is wonderful compensation in unreservedly presenting our bodies a living sacrifice.

J.R. It seems to me that if I present my body a living sacrifice and am maintained in that, I would not count any individual thing I did as a sacrifice because I am the sacrifice in that sense. It is a life of sacrifice. Therefore we would not be thinking of the cost of certain things.

W.D. That would take the savour of the thing away. It is one of the simple exercises for which you need special grace - to come to a thing like that. That is why I think the compassions of God are invoked as if to say they are so mighty.

J.R. It is the compulsion of grace, compulsion of the compassions of God, "compel to come in", Luke 14: 23.

J.H. Would verse 3 link with hymn No 293: 'Thy grace, O Lord, that measured once the deep'? Grace was inherent in Him and 'measured once the deep'. I suppose that would be the compassions of God, what God has done in Christ for us. And now Paul is speaking of the grace given to him and he is appealing to us, "to everyone that is among you, not to have high thoughts above what he should think". Would that be a danger with us? "But to think so as to be wise, as God has dealt to each a measure of faith".

W.D. We have a measure of faith and God considers for that, and we have to be very sober in our assessment of matters. Jephthah was not sober.

J.H. No. I was thinking of it for our younger brethren especially, to think soberly. God has given to every one a measure of faith, and every one has a part to fill out in the testimony. Have we a sober judgment of what God has given us, what we can manage, so to speak?

W.D. Exactly. We do not doubt (just to carry on the illustration) Jephthah's sincerity and zeal but he was not sober in that vow (see Judg 11: 30). I think it means that when you are dealing with divine things God is expecting sobriety and reality.

J.H. Our younger brethren perhaps hold back a bit, but God has given them a measure of faith. If they had a sober estimate of that, perhaps they would come forward.

R.W. The great qualifying word is "acceptable to God". I was thinking about John Mark. There was contention between Paul and Barnabas about him but John Mark was not presenting himself; that was the trouble. He was being presented and he was not fit, but the day came when Paul says "he is serviceable", 2 Tim 4: 11.

W.D. That is very good.

J.R. What you are bringing before us and what Mr White says is very interesting because it is as we present our bodies a living

sacrifice that we arrive at our place in the one body in Christ. There is no other way of arriving at that. There is a link therefore between our bodies and the one body in Christ.

W.D. We have spoken once or twice in our city readings about Mr Stoney's remark that a believer is never happy until he finds his place in the body.

J.R. Yes, and this is the way to it. When the believer presents his body a living sacrifice he finds by subjection to the Lord and working with his fellow believers what his measure of faith is and he finds his place in the one body in Christ.

G.A.B. You could hardly say service is intelligent unless it is related in some way to the body.

W.D. That is right, and particularly as we recognise how the collective thought is so much in God's mind in the Scriptures. It takes you back to Genesis 22: "On the mount of Jehovah will be provided" (v 14). One of the things that is provided on the mount of Jehovah is the blessed light of what is collective.

R.W. Do you think that the gospel by Mark is a standing memorial to his intelligence in service? It is really the knowledge of Christ.

W.D. That is right, and is brought about through the work of God in a young man in that way.

R.W. It is the great service gospel.

W.D. Now in 2 Corinthians 4 one was thinking of the service of the ministry. We would speak in a very lowly way about that, but the work of the ministry, whether it is the gospel preaching or any service of that character, has to be carried on sacrificially. It says "ourselves your bondmen for Jesus' sake". What a touch that is! There is constant reference to Jesus - "Jesus' sake", "the dying of Jesus", "the life also of Jesus", "on account of Jesus". There is something to touch our affections in that. And he says "Because it is the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine". Paul would think of the divine intervention. That was in the beginning of Genesis; but then he would think of the divine intervention in his life as recorded in

Acts 9; the God who out of darkness spoke that light should shine had shone into his heart.

R.S.R. The vessels have to be dispensed with in order that the light may shine as in Gideon's pitchers. Is it not always an exercise that the servant should be out of sight? "For we do not preach ourselves" but that Christ Jesus Lord should be brought into evidence.

W.D. That is right, and the Lord has His own way of reaching that end. If service is taken up in any degree - I say this for the encouragement of the many younger men the Lord is raising up these days - it is not only a matter of the degree of knowledge that they have equipped themselves with (though without it they cannot serve) or any gift they may have inherently or naturally, but something under the Lord's hand will go into the formation of the vessel that is more indispensable than what they acquire otherwise.

W.G. I was interested in this reference to "radiancy". Do you think that something of that should mark service? The light has shone into them and there would be a shining out.

W.D. So you are not only ministering the letter of the word but something that reflects your link with that blessed Person.

W.G. Yes, something of "the radiancy of... the glory of the Christ" filling the soul.

E.J.J. It speaks of God shining in: "Because it is the God who spoke... who has shone in our hearts for the shining forth".

W.D. You think of the divine intervention in Acts 9. There was that young man; the light from heaven came into his soul on that Damascus road, and the word to Ananias was "this man is an elect vessel to me" (v 15). You think of the way that the Lord took in order that that young man should be taken up at that early stage of his life as "an elect vessel to me". It came about as the result of a divine intervention.

J.R.C. Paul still carries forward the thought of 'bondmen' here.

W.D. It is that spirit in which he serves as if, following the word of the Lord Himself, you serve the saints as not above them in any

sense. It is not that ministering distinguishes you, it is just that you serve in the spirit of bondmanship for Jesus' sake. What do you think of that expression "Jesus' sake"?

J.R.C. Is that the standard in everything?

W.D. Yes. It lays bare every motive that you have in service.

A.C.C. Chapter 3 speaks about competency as ministers of the new covenant. That would ensure that in the gospel God's dispensation came out, but would this ensure that the full glory in the face of Jesus Christ, which is also a new covenant glory, would be told out with a sort of alluring effect?

W.D. Through vessels that have come under the Lord's hand. There is the formation that goes into a vessel. There is the sovereign side, the choice that goes into a servant - that has to be recognised - but the "treasure in earthen vessels" - you have to weigh up the disciplinary side of your life in regard to the capacity or the competency for the light to shine forth.

A.C.C. I was interested in the allusion to the vessels being broken. Mark also was referred to. Mark shows us the woman anointing the Lord's head. It says that she "broke" the alabaster flask. You just wonder how much our own personalities may come in in the preaching, or whether you can concentrate on a view of Christ with the glory shining in His face.

W.D. As feeling that matter - and I think most who serve do feel it - how would you seek help in regard to it?

A.C.C. Mark gives us the truth of abandonment, and that was the word Paul used about him: "who had abandoned them... and had not gone with them to the work", Acts 15: 38. Mark takes up that thought of abandonment, does he not? and he shows that woman, how she abandoned herself in view of what she was doing to Jesus. I think the truth of the abandonment would help us.

W.D. So there are two things that ministry calls for: one is to keep near the death of Christ, and secondly, complete and entire dependence on the Spirit.

R.S. In Mark's gospel too we have the Lord's own words: "and whosoever shall receive me, does not receive me, but him who sent me", chap 9: 37. It is as if the Lord, speaking reverently, was hiding Himself, seeking to bring into prominence the One who sent Him.

W.D. "Take Mark, and bring him with thyself, for he is serviceable to me for ministry", 2 Tim 4: 11. There is nothing lost. Failure comes into most lives, and yet you think of the infinite grace of the Lord that He is going to see that there is a representation of Himself through something wrought out in the vessel as a result of the experience that has been gone through with God. I do not think that service carries much weight unless there is a process gone through that stands in relation to what is sacrificial in the believer himself and related to what is sacrificial in the service of divine Persons towards him.

J.N. Would this scripture just confirm that, that bondman service would involve service in adverse circumstances?

W.D. It would. Reference has been made to Paul being at Corinth, how he served them - "if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved", 2 Cor 12: 15.

R.W. He says just a little further down here, "always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus" (v 10). In all his service that sacrificial element shone out.

W.D. That is a profound statement, and I would like the brethren just soberly and prayerfully for a few moments to enquire what it means.

J.R. Do you think it links with the sufferings of verses 8 and 9? It is "always bearing about in the body the dying" (or 'putting to death') of Jesus.

W.D. I think it does, and that is an aspect of service that you need great grace for.

J.R. It is the suffering, is it not? The shining in would be perfect, but the shining forth is the test, whether the vessel obscures the shining forth. What shines in is the radiancy of the glory of the Christ - that

is in the gospel - but then what shines forth from the vessel is the test, is it not?

W.D. Particularly when it relates, as we have often been taught, to the downward path of the Lord, that period in the Lord's life when it meant that all that was ahead of Him was suffering and the cross.

There was no question of a recompense with the Lord. It was just that He devoted Himself absolutely to the will of God.

R.S.R. It is not the death of Jesus; it is "the dying of Jesus". Does that involve a process and has it not been linked with Luke 9: "he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" v. 5).

W.D. Exactly.

T.N.P. Does it link in any way with Paul's initial impression: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest"? Did he learn in the three days and then in the three years afterwards what "the dying of Jesus" was? He began with a Jesus who was persecuted. He was doing it, but then he had to learn in himself what that meant, and is that what you refer to as a process? It takes time.

W.D. Yes, something went into him initially in his contact with the Lord that, so to speak, entered into the texture of his life, which formed him as a vessel, and it stood related to the dying of Jesus.

J.R. "Every way afflicted... seeing no apparent issue ... persecuted... cast down": these would be circumstances and sufferings he went through, and he regards them all as helping, "that the surpassingness of the power may be of God, and not from us".

W.D. That is good. You can relate this in a sense to the scripture we had yesterday in Colossians: filling "up that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh, for his body" (chap 1: 24), and brings home to us the wonderful heritage of Pauline ministry that we are exulting in this afternoon. This was the way to it.

J.R. It would seem as if these sufferings were forced upon him and would be one of the means of keeping him humble and out of sight.

He says "for we who live are always delivered unto death on account of Jesus".

P.H.B. Would it not be exemplified in Stephen? He really expressed the "dying of Jesus", did he not?

W.D. Yes, he shone out, radiancy was there. It shone out in a vessel in such contrary circumstances, forced upon him as Mr Renton says. How faithful he was in that way!

A.T. It is not an end in itself but a means to an end. "The life also of Jesus" is the end in view, is it not?

W.D. That is right.

D.L.S. It is "bearing about in the body". That body had been offered as a sacrifice, but it is not only how it is held for service, but it would be the way of being formed, would it not?

W.D. We get in that choice vessel something of what God had wrought in his soul to give him liberty and power in this glorious ministry that he had. There are a lot of younger men here this afternoon, and we are thankful, if the Lord tarry, that the levitical outlook is bright, but what is sacrificial must enter into all service of a ministerial character, whether you preach or give a lead in a fellowship meeting or a reading, if you do not weigh up soberly the need for the sacrificial element, you lose power. It is not the words, it is the power that is needed in ministry, and you get it in that sacrificial side.

D.McG. Do you think in that way that in the great administrative chapter in Acts 15 you have the combination of both your scriptures? It says not only that they chose men but they have been sent "with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have given up their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v 26). I thought you see the radiancy there.

W.D. What a commendation after what we touched yesterday as to the act of Barnabas in what he gave up in that way!

We should have a short word on Acts 20, the service of shepherding. The elders from Ephesus are exhorted by the apostle "to shepherd the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own".

J.R. "Purchased with the blood of his own" would be the way that Paul regarded shepherding the saints. If it be an individual it is one of this company. He was three years in Ephesus, and this seems to be the motive that caused him to be so devoted to these saints.

W.D. So you see the spirit of the Hebrew servant shining through it: "I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free", Exod 21: 5.

J.R. He said "I ceased not admonishing each one of you". "Each one of you" would be each one of "the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own" in that sense, do you think?

W.D. It is that altitude of things. You may be put in a small locality, as many of our brethren here are, and yet in this shepherdly service you adorn that little company with that: the assembly of God.

J.R. I thought of this scripture when we were speaking of laying down our lives for the brethren. Paul addresses the overseers; if any have to lay down their lives for the brethren it is those who take any responsibility for their souls' welfare.

A.J.G. The Lord Himself showed the way when it says "and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out". Then it says "he goes before them" (John 10: 3,4), as though there was this individual touch, knowing every one of them and giving each one an individual call. But then as together He would be there as the Leader, do you think?

W.D. Yes, it is a shepherdly activity night and day. We do not know much about that - at least I speak for myself.

A.J.G. Paul speaks of that in this very chapter - "night and day, I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears".

J.H. Is there the idea of a lever for the soul in each of these scriptures? In the first scripture "the compassions of God", perhaps "the dying of Jesus" in the second, but in this one would it be the divine valuation of the assembly of God "which he has purchased

with the blood of his own"? The shepherd would get that into his soul, the divine valuation of the assembly.

W.D. Exactly. So the Spirit of God uses the word "purchased" with intent; He does not use the word 'redeemed'.

H.W. Peter speaks of shepherding "the flock of God", then he goes on to refer to "the chief shepherd", 1 Pet 5: 2,4. It is lovely to think of the Chief Shepherd, is it not?

W.D. That is right. In Hebrews too it says "the God of peace, who brought again from among the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, in the power of the blood of the eternal covenant" (chap 13: 20), again emphasising the sacrificial side, the 'purchase' side, not redeemed but purchased.

C.A.G. 'Purchased' here is strictly 'purchased for Himself' "with the blood of his own" as the note indicates. It gives a distinctive touch, does it not? And would it not have in view what is finally reached in Ephesians 3, "glory in the assembly" (v 21). Does this shepherding stand in relation to that?

W.D. What divine Persons esteem of such great value should not we in our service amongst our local brethren esteem of such great value?

J.R. It seems to me that it is in the light of that that Paul begins by saying "Take heed therefore to yourselves", in the light of "the assembly of God which he has purchased with the blood of his own". "Take heed therefore to yourselves", he says, "and to all the flock", which I would take to be the local flock.

W.D. Exactly; and as to these men who arise "speaking perverted things", I think we want to scrutinise very soberly in the Lord's presence any tendency inwardly to deviate from what the Spirit of God is stressing currently amongst His people. Saints who are near the Lord and are subject in their minds can discern where the Spirit of God is working, what He is doing and what He is saying. As thinking of the flock we want to judge anything that might tend to

pervert the truth. It comes in easily. You pervert something and then you find it easy to pervert something else.

R.S. Is that the value of the expression "all the time" which comes in in the Acts? First of all in connection with Jesus, "all the time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out" (chap 1: 21); then Paul says "Ye know how I was with you all the time" (chap 20: 18); his three years at Ephesus, and the Lord's public ministry of three and a half years.

W.D. What a spirit!

H.B. The assembly of God in Corinth we understand to be a testimonial idea, but is the assembly of God as set here in Acts 20 something further than that and relates perhaps to Ephesians 3?

W.D. What Mr Gray said bears that out; it is for God's pleasure and delight, and as the vessel of service, even throughout all eternity.

That is the aspect of it here. I think we could well conclude the occasion by just reading verse 35: "I have shewed you all things, that thus labouring we ought to come in aid of the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive".

J.F. I was just going to ask you about that because it seems very necessary in the present day that we ought to come in aid of the weak.

W.D. "The weak" would come under the care of the shepherd, and there is a great provision in the divine system for weakness; the Priest stands in relation to it.

EDINBURGH

17 June 1978

Key to initials

A.A.Brown, Grangemouth; G.A.Brown, Edinburgh; H.Brown, Kilmarlock; P.H.Buchan, Aberdeen; A.C.Craig, Airdrie;

A.C.Clapham, Manchester; J.A.Cumming, Edinburgh; W.Dickson, Edinburgh; J.Franklin, Grimsby; A.J.Gaskin, Aberdeen; C.A.Gray, Helston; P.Grant, Dundee; W.Grosse, Edinburgh; J.Harthill, Glasgow; C.C.Ikin, Southend; E.J.Jarvis, Torbay; W.Lamont, Cumnock; D.Melvin, Kilmarnock; J.Mair, Cullen A.McKay, Brechin; D.McGregor, Lochgelly; J.Newberry, Hamilton; T.N.Pye, Kirkcaldy; D.Robertson, Cumnock; J.Renton, Edinburgh; R.S.Renton, Edinburgh; D.L.Stewart, Edinburgh; R.Swan, Edinburgh; A.Thomson, Lochgelly; M.B.Thompson, Aberdeen; H.Wilkinson, Manchester; R.White, Londonderry; S.Young, Lochgelly

ENLARGEMENT

J.A.McLaren

2 Kings 24: 8-16; Ezra 2: 1-3, 36, 40-43, 55, 58, 64-67, 70

There is a clause in the middle of a verse in one of the psalms that says "In pressure thou hast enlarged me", Ps 4: 1. It is one of the apparent contradictions in Scripture, some of which are in Paul's writings: "as poor but enriching many; as having nothing, and possessing all things" (2 Cor 6: 10); "as unknown, and well known" (v 9). When pressure is applied it makes for constriction, and yet the Spirit of God says through the psalmist that in that circumstance there is enlargement. The psalmist is speaking of two different things going on concurrently. He is speaking of the pressure that God may be pleased to exercise in our outward circumstances, maybe as to our bodies in weakness, maybe in our spirits, maybe in our circumstances as to work. What a variety of things God uses to bring discipline and pressure upon us, not in a punitive sense but in view of enlargement! I remember an old brother many years ago who had a very serious illness; when someone quoted this scripture

to him he said, being somewhat despondent, I think I have the pressure without the enlargement; but the brethren were quick to point out that with all these brethren visiting him and their ministrations and the help he was getting they believed he was getting enlargement spiritually even although there was pressure upon him physically. God intends that it should be so. Of course we do not like pressure but there is a word in Hebrews which is well known: "but afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it" (chap 12: 11) and God, I believe, intends that any exercise or sorrow or discipline through which we may pass should produce that result. Of course that would have special force to us individually, but I am not only concerned about the individual side, important as that is; I am thinking of the collective side too because we get pressure in that sphere, and how do we react to that? Are we concerned to see that there is going to be enlargement in that sphere?

There is a remarkable word in the beginning of Ezekiel which is not easy to understand. You remember when Ezekiel gives a detailed account of the measurements of the future temple, while those in Ezekiel's day would be familiar with the way in which things were put technically (they would understand it) it is not put out in just the way in which we describe things now. There is no blue-print there, no lines and figures to explain the whole thing in the way of a plan. It is difficult to understand, but one thing that is clear is what it says at one point as to the house itself, that "the house had width upward", Ezek 41: 7. Now that is an interesting thing when we consider that just shortly after it says as to certain cells relative to the court that the cells were a certain size on the lower story and they were straitened or narrowed on the third story (see chap 42: 6).

These things go on together: "the house had width upward" (that is the saints); there is a certain measurement below and, owing to the construction of the place, it was wider as you went up and wider still at the top; yet the cells were wide at the bottom and narrower as you went up. What does it mean? I would like that the Holy Spirit might give some impression to us, dear brethren, no doubt more full than I

could give, but the impression I have is that where that restriction is experienced in our exercises before God, exercises connected with the testimony, exercises relative to what is for a return to God in the way of praise and worship and thanksgiving, as to assembly matters, along with that can we trace an expansion among the saints generally, relative to what is pleasing to Him which is spoken of as His house? God's house is really the place where He is pleased to dwell, and the tabernacle and the house have that feature about them that it is a sphere where God has things according to His own mind. When the Lord said to the two "Come and see" (John 1: 39) they must have had a very definite impression of Jesus from the very surroundings in which they saw Him dwelling. We do not know what they were like of course. We do not know exactly what sort of furniture would be there but I believe there would be an impression, in the very surroundings, of the lowly Person Jesus. Of course the primary impression would be as to the Person of Jesus Himself, not only His lowliness but really who was there. They would have some impression of His greatness but also an impression, in His surroundings, of what He expected in the way of suitable conditions for Himself, even in lowliness. Now the scripture says "in his temple doth every one" (or 'everything') "say, Glory!", Ps 29: 9. You get that word 'every one' or 'everything' in Scripture, a word which means one of persons or things: "so that by the grace of God he should taste death for every thing" (or 'every one'), Heb 2: 9. How comprehensive and full that is! And in the temple 'everything speaks, Glory', and it is in such a place that God is pleased to dwell and where He will have things for His pleasure. In Ezekiel's temple is a picture - an example - of what is for the pleasure of God, and our concern should be, surely, in our exercises and in the sorrows of the way and the discipline, is there that progressing concurrently in the way of expansion and enlargement relative to what is for God's pleasure and glory?

We have this as a principle all through Scripture. God is pleased to turn to good account what is apparently a calamity in the eyes of men and sometimes a calamity in the eyes of the saints.

The two on the way to Emmaus proved that. They were very despondent. They thought everything was finished: "But we had hoped that he was the one who is about to redeem Israel", Luke 24: 21. Their hopes were set in that direction and the thing was all in their eyes a collapse, you might say. It was not so, of course, thanks be to God. But then in what appeared to be great calamity God brought the most wonderful blessing out of it. What a result for God's glory and praise from that mighty transaction there! What importance attached to it! And so right through the Scriptures. You get it in Paul's case too, a chosen vessel of God, a preacher of God's glad tidings to bring the Lord's Name before nations and kings and the sons of Israel. He was specially capacitated and chosen for that purpose, an official servant, as the scripture describes him: "to appoint thee to be a servant and a witness both of what thou hast seen, and of what I shall appear to thee in, taking thee out from among the people, and the nations, to whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me", Acts 26: 16-18. And Paul says "Whereupon, king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (v 19). He carried it out. We say, Well, that is very good, so he did, from Jerusalem round about in a circuit to Illyricum he had fully preached the glad tidings (see Rom 15: 19). But then there comes a time when Paul is in prison. Oh, something wrong here, surely, man would say. What is Paul in prison for? Part of God's ways; part of the restriction; part of the narrowing of the cells as you go up. And what we find, remarkably, is that in these circumstances it says he "received all who came to him" (Acts 28: 30), 'received with welcome all who came to him'.

What a word! And in these very circumstances from his pen at that point there came these remarkable impressions which are so important to the saints throughout the ages, which are so elevated in their character, although, of course, all scriptures are important; we would not overlook that. But the special character of these epistles which Paul wrote from prison must, surely, impress us all. The precious truths that are there! How else could they be brought out?

The very circumstances in which they are brought out emphasise to our hearts that in God's ways it is in circumstances of pressure and discipline that there are rich results secured for Himself.

The scriptures read in Kings and Ezra seem to be linked. There are a lot of numbers here, numbers of people, and a sad chapter in Israel's history, seventy years of captivity, ordered of God. We say, a sad affair that, why was that? Because of their own failure and breakdown. Well then, how could good come out of that? But good did come out of it and if we read scripture carefully we will see things that are not apparent on the surface. Read scripture carefully, even the very detail, the numbers that are there, every verse, carefully look at it and ask the Spirit for help. You will find that there is a freshness and a beauty and a choiceness about it that might not be understood by casual reading. The captivity recounted here and in 2 Kings 24 is what the Jews term the 'great captivity'. There were four distinct movements to Babylon. The first one in a sense is important in that the king, it appears, and the princes and the prominent people were taken away and it is from the first one that the seventy years date. But then this is the second one and the Jews call this the "great captivity" probably because there are such large numbers taken away. Then there is a third one when, according to Jeremiah, there are hundreds taken away, and a fourth one. A period of about twenty years extends between them all. It says here that there were ten thousand captives including craftsmen and smiths and men of war; and in the reckoning given by Jeremiah which was on a different basis, perhaps the heads of families - I do not know - the numbers are even smaller than this. But what is striking is that when they came back from Babylon (it was only part of them that came back) there are fifty thousand - five times these people. Why was that? The answer, dear brethren, is simply this that they had got the gain of Jeremiah's ministry. Of course they were an earthly people. Their blessing was measured in material things. We are to bear that in mind when we read Jeremiah, who sent a message to them when they were in Babylon. He said in effect, Do not listen to your prophets who say it will all soon be over,

it is just a flash in the pan; two years and it will be all over and we will be back again. Oh no, Jeremiah says, not at all, seventy years he says. You have to go through the thing, in other words. The discipline is there, ordered of God; Israel had been unfaithful, the responsible persons there; and the king had also been unfaithful and the people had followed him in it, and God says seventy years to a year and no mistaking about it. That may appear very hard, but then good is going to come out of it. Jeremiah says, This is the word of Jehovah to you: "Build houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. Take wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there, and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto Jehovah for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace", Jer 29: 5, 7.

Now that was a simple word, just temporal things that the prophet is speaking about, building houses and eating the fruit of the garden, all temporal, natural things; we are dealing with people whose blessing was measured in terms of temporal things although, of course, their great blessing was in knowing the God in relation to whom they stood. How glorious that is! That was the prime thing. But then they answered to the word; ten thousand taken away, fifty thousand came back.

Well, dear brethren, are we concerned to move in simple submission to God's ordering? Things are in ruin publicly at the present time but what is vital and for God's glory and pleasure, the vessels that He is securing for His praise, the praise that is actually going to Him, is that finished? Certainly not. God takes account of that and He sees increase in it; so with decreasing numbers outwardly speaking, is there to be an increased response to God? Thank God there can be and that is our desire in connection with this discipline through which He passes us. It may not appear very pleasant to us. This matter of captivity is a real thing; the people were restricted. The psalm says "By the rivers of Babylon, there we

sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that made us wail required mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How should we sing a song of Jehovah's upon a foreign soil?", Ps 137: 14. Then the writer goes on to say "If I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill; If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to my palate: if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (vv 5, 6). The latter part of the psalm concerns something that would not be taken up in the Christian era - judgment on enemies.

Now are we submissive to what God orders in the way of restriction in numbers? Thank God if we have a few and what is for God's pleasure in our localities. We can be restive and perhaps tend to be disconcerted and discontented with the very restrictions God brings in. I remember, to speak simply and practically, being in the army, and in the early stages there was a regulation that you dare not go any more than three miles from the camp. Where I was there were two cities near one another, you could not distinguish them, all the one place really, and on Saturday afternoon we were free from work. The brethren would say, There is a meeting in the neighbouring town three and a half miles away. Well, I cannot go there. Some thought it might not matter. But it does matter. The army regulation was that you will not go any more than three miles and I felt very disconsolate after wandering about with nobody to speak to and the brethren all away. The brethren were not tied, but I was, in the Lord's ordering, and some scriptures in Proverbs came to me indicating that it is better to submit to what God orders in the way of limitation than to burst through these restrictions. Very good and right that we should take advantage of fellowship meetings when we can, but if God imposes restriction upon us, are we to get the gain of it and use the time profitably?

Another matter in this scripture is that persons who are carried away are described as princes and mighty men of valour and craftsmen and smiths. I do not know but I have the impression that these craftsmen and smiths would be mainly concerned about

sharpening the swords and the spears and not so much concerned about sharpening the sickles and axes and ploughs and the hoes for cultivating God's inheritance. What had governed these persons up until this time was largely restlessness and rebellion against the authority that was set above them. But what is striking is that when they came back it was not craftsmen and smiths who came back; of course, you say, there would be these among them; probably there would be, but they are not mentioned, just as there is no word in Kings about taking priests away. According to Ezra, those who returned were the people of Jehovah and the children - there has been increase - and the priests and Levites and singers and doorkeepers and Nethinim and Solomon's servants, and there is much substance with them; that is God's disciplinary ways had borne fruit and the acceptance of the restrictions that were put upon them and the acceptance of Jeremiah's prophetic word had so affected them that they came out with substance. They came out with servants and maids. There was no word of servants and maids going into captivity. They probably did not have many of them. They were servants themselves and yet there are forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty besides their servants and maids and singing men and singing women. They did not sing when they were going into captivity, nor did they sing in Babylon according to the Psalm - they were not disposed to do that - but now they are singing because God had come in for them so gloriously, so wonderfully, come in in deliverance for them; but although it needed God's hand and they were thankful for that and God's time had come, behind it all, I believe, lay the acceptance of His governmental dealings.

May our hearts be encouraged with this, the substance that is secured to God's glory and praise from His people as in such circumstances. In our day we may look about and see persons who are getting plenty of people listening to the preaching and getting apparent results too. It is a concern to me that so few come into our rooms, but then we are thankful for the few who do and that the privilege is given us of preaching the word because there is testimony in that. If we break bread and show forth the Lord's death

till He come, there is testimony in that too, and the preaching goes on whether or not people will listen. Along with that I am thankful for what we see in the way of development with the saints of an increase spiritually. May the Lord encourage us with these things for His Name's sake.

KILMARNOCK

27 May 1978

THE CHILDREN'S REPENTANCE

In the course of His teaching the Lord Jesus told a simple story about a disobedient child who, happily, "repented himself". When his father had told him to go and work in the vineyard the boy had very definitely refused to do so, but later he went and worked. What then caused him to change his mind and do the will of his father? We are not told, but perhaps he remembered that he really owed everything to his loving father and must therefore do his bidding. Thus in our own case it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. Possibly the boy became afraid of the just punishment for being disobedient, and this would surely urge him to surrender. For such a merciful reason God has now enjoined that all persons everywhere should repent.

Whatever the child's feelings and reasonings may have been, at any rate it was his father's will that now decided him. So, for us, true repentance is always "towards God" and this enables us to see ourselves in the light of His holiness. It is really brought about by God's own work in our souls and with it comes "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ" whose atoning work has dealt with all that called for repentance on our part.

The repentant boy in the story told by Jesus had a brother who also was sent by their father to work in the vineyard. He answered in a way which was certainly polite - calling his father "Sir" - yet which at the same time showed a lack of the normal, lively affection of a son. It is true that he said he would go but, sorrowfully, the Lord added that he "went not". The moral of this was brought to bear by Jesus upon the merely religious persons around Him but it is for each of us to search whether we are in reality doing the will of our Father who is in the heavens.

A good example of a repenting sinner coming into blessing is the so-called prodigal son. Of him it has been said that on "coming to himself" he *repented* and saw his own evil in the light of the loving-kindness of his father. When he said "I will rise up and go to

my father" he took a further step in soul-history and became *converted*, or changed. When, however, he met his father and received the best robe, he knew what it was to be *blessed* with the fulness of the glad tidings. Have you travelled the whole of this road yet?

J.C.Evershed