

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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THE GOSPEL IN ISAIAH

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Isaiah 40: 9

This chapter in Isaiah is introduced with the intention of God's people being comforted; it begins "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God". Israel will yet in a day to come be comforted by the range of things that is brought in it. The chapter has often been a comfort to souls even before that day of Israel's revival; I myself have fresh in my memory the impression of an address given on it in London in the early days of the last war; and God would speak to His people at any time in the tones of comfort: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people". The end of the chapter is rather like the end of Romans 8: there is power to prevail.

The presentation of things at the beginning of this chapter, however, is not exactly that which would be preached in the present day because there is no gospel today that tells people that they have received from God's hand double for all their sins. I do not think there will ever be a preaching that says that; it is a statement of God's government in regard to Israel. There is no question of preaching to people in this day that God is going to give them double for their sins. That is not to say that God's government does not work, and that if people sin God's government may follow them. It is not for us to prescribe to each other the nature of God's government, but thank God there is not a preaching like that. Thank God that none of us has to bear from His hand double for all our sins; we would all be thankful for that.

But there is a gospel in this chapter; one could preach from any section of it; each of the paragraphs has something distinctly evangelical in it; it would not be at all difficult to preach from Isaiah 40. There are glad tidings as to which Zion and Jerusalem are encouraged to shout; it says "O Zion, that bringest glad tidings, get thee up into a high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest glad tidings, lift up thy voice with strength". There are glad tidings which are to be

proclaimed, and I suppose that each of us as being fairly familiar with the text of the Scriptures would find that the prophecy of Isaiah is one that is replete with the gospel. It is the gospel for Israel; surprisingly enough it is a prophecy but it is replete with the Christian gospel. The theologians would tell us that at this point in Isaiah there is a different strain taken up. Of course they just apply theology to the word of God, and they apply criticism in its strict sense and come to certain conclusions, but they come to conclusions because of the premises from which they start. (It is easy if you want to lead an argument a certain way to make sure that the beginning of the argument is on the terms you would like to state; then you have some greater opportunity of coming to the conclusion that you wish.) The second part of Isaiah, from this chapter onwards certainly, has a distinctive tone and character about it, looking on in a distinctive way to the world to come, but it necessarily follows chapters in which God's judgment in relation to the nations in particular has had to be set out. This chapter tells us that God regards the nations as a drop of the bucket; He takes up the isles as a very small thing; princes and judges He blows upon just as He blows upon the grass of the field.

In the first part of Isaiah there is almost set out in order the Christian gospel. It is not that I want to give an outline of the first thirty-nine chapters but I draw attention to matters in it in the order in which they occur. In chapter 1 the state of Israel is described by God, that is that the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot to the head there is no soundness in him, his wounds have not been dressed or bound up or mollified with oil. That is the state of Israel but it is the moral state of man; from the sole of his foot to the head there is no soundness in him. That is a moral view of man as he is away from God. Israel is viewed in most of this book as away from God and needing to be recovered, and that is the place of man, that he is away from God and needs to be recovered, and his moral state is described in terms which bring out its corruption. It is essential that we keep in view that that is a moral view of man as he is, because there are elements in man in which

we find good, and we are often impressed by the way in which characteristics of what is good come out in people. We are often touched by the kindness of unbelieving people, their care, their courtesy, and yet the moral state of man is away from God as is described there, that from the sole of the foot to the head there is no soundness in him. You do not wonder that when in a Jewish setting in Acts 3 a man was healed, Peter says that he has "complete soundness in the presence of you all" (v 16); there is an answer to Isaiah 1 where there was no soundness. A man was constituted perfectly sound; scriptures fit together as they were made to do so; Acts 3 is the answer in demonstration to Isaiah 1. But lower down that chapter God begins to speak about sins; "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (v 18). God does not content Himself, as it were, with describing man in terms which require moral interpretation; God brings out plainly what the actual issue between Himself and man is, that is to say it is man's sins. I do not need here to go back to the beginning of Genesis and trace the way in which sins came into the world; the conscience of every man and woman in this day will tell them that they have sins if they view themselves before God. These things are to be recognised, to be admitted, that man as before God is a sinner. I read somewhere once of a man, I think a professor, who described evil done against oneself as vice, evil done against somebody else as crime; evil done against God as sin. But whatever evil or bad that man has done is an offence against God; maybe done against himself - Corinthians and Romans bring out that aspect of things - maybe done against his fellow man, which in the eyes of men might be crime, but against God it is sin. God begins in Isaiah 1; "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool". It does not tell you in that chapter how God is going to bring it about; if God says it you can be sure it will be brought about, but what is brought out in chapter 1 is that people are sinners. That is the starting point of the gospel. One could start, in preaching the gospel, from the existence of God, but I start from the way in which Isaiah unfolds things, that men and women are sinners.

Then in chapter 6 you have a man in the presence of God and of the holiness of God. Think of that: a man there who recognises that he is a sinner - as he must recognise that he is a sinner - but in the presence of God it is revealed to him that he is a sinner. He is undone, he says, a man of unclean lips and dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips (see v 5). Why does he say that? Because he has been impressed with the holiness of God. It is having to do with God in His holiness which brings home to the conscience that one is a sinner. God does not in this prophecy start with declaring who He is although the prophecy of Isaiah is full of absolute statements about who God is - "I am" and "I am He" runs through this prophecy - but He starts with the state of man. Then as you follow the thread it is almost as if God says, If you do not believe that that is your state, come into My presence where there is infinite holiness. As the prophet goes into the presence of God - and we may think of the prophet as one of the best of his day - he sees God high and lifted up and His train filling the temple, and voices say "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts"; and the prophet says "Woe unto me! for I am undone", chap 6: 3,5. Peter was brought to say he was a sinful man by the goodness of God, that is clear from Luke, and in a certain sense it led him to repentance; but the point to which the soul has ultimately to come is the conviction of its state in the light of a God who is holy. Beloved, let us never forget the holiness of God. (We have referred earlier to the possibility of undue familiarity or irreverence in the presence of God; let us never forget that God is holy). The seraphim say "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts": let us be affected by that. Let it affect our souls that unless God has come in on our side the result in us must be to acknowledge that in the presence of that holiness we are undone. Isaiah says "I am a man of unclean lips"; it corresponds with what the Lord says in the gospel, that it is not what goes into a man that defiles him but what comes out of him (see Mark 7: 15). Isaiah was clearly in the light of that teaching, that what came out of him was unclean, and therefore the man must be unclean in the light of the holiness of God.

Isaiah immediately goes through certain experiences with the live coal taken from off the altar as to which we could speak, but what I want to go to is chapter 9 where the word that comes in is exactly the way in which God has met the state of man in the light of the holiness of God: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (v.6). That is the way in which God who is holy has Himself come in on man's behalf, by sending His Son in the form of a child, just as a child. It says that in the beginning of Matthew - "the little child". In the Acts it says "thy holy child Jesus" (chap 4: 27, A.V.): think of that! Have you understood that when that little Child was born He was given to you? "Unto us" - it was to you. In its setting dispensationally it was to Israel, and Isaiah 9 is in relation to Israel for it goes on to bring out the great titles He will have in the world to come when He administers everything for God. But take it into our own day: what I am saying is that you can follow through Isaiah the Christian gospel. You start with the fact that your sins have been brought home to you in the light of the holiness of God and what is needed then is that God gives a Child - "unto us a child is born "; it is as the Lord says parabolically of God in the gospels: at last, He said, I will send my Son (see Matt 21: 37). It was not *their* son - "unto us a son is given". Of course according to flesh Christ came of Israel - "of whom, as according to flesh, is the Christ" says Paul in Romans 9 (v.5), but the Son is not exactly for Israel but is given to us, and to *us* a Son is born.

What did they do with Him when a Child was given to them? The first thing was to reveal that there was no room for Him; God gave them a Child and there was no room for Him - not anywhere. So He was born in a manger, in conditions which bore out that there was no room here for the intervention of God in the form of a Man in relation to man's condition. And He grew up as a boy, the child Jesus, He increased in wisdom and stature; He lived with His father and mother and according to reputation He worked in His father's business - "Is not this the son of the carpenter? " Matt 13: 55. But He was here about His Father's business - "did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business?", Luke 2: 39. Very

interesting to think what Jesus had in view in that expression! From the actual setting out of things in Luke I think that His Father's business was the interpretation of the Old Testament to those who already had the gain of it because in chapter 24 He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself. When He was in the temple hearing and answering questions He was in His Father's business opening out the truth of God to men in order that men might be instructed by it. What would He have said about Isaiah? What did He say about Isaiah in Luke 4? - "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears" (v 21). As you take account of Isaiah 9, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given", He could have said " Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears" because He was there as given to them, the child Jesus. He was born to them, given to them, but at last betrayed by them, to the Romans in order that He might be crucified. This is the aspect of things being done by the hands of wicked men, that He was crucified and slain, but from God's point of view it was the necessary sacrifice to maintain the holiness of God while allowing Him to pardon and forgive sinners. This chapter says "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem... that her iniquity is pardoned" (v.2). He was crucified in order that God might still maintain His holiness and righteousness when pardoning sinners. We do not wonder that Isaiah begins this chapter with comfort, for persons are shut up to what God will do in a situation where His holiness has revealed them to be unclean and to be sinners. What God will do will be for comfort, and God has Himself provided a Child, indeed provided His Son, given at length in death - "He who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Rom 8: 32) - in order that that having been done, God might retain all His holiness and righteousness and be One that can pardon iniquity.

So you can trace the Christian gospel through the beginning of Isaiah and find that man is undone and unclean, find the holiness of God, and that the Child or the Son has been the means of providing God with a basis on which He can make the unclean clean. He can fill lips with praise that were unclean lips, and even the nations,

according to Romans, will glorify God for mercy, (see chap 15: 9) all because God has given us a Child, given unto us His Son, Himself giving what was nearest and dearest to Him. The footnote in Proverbs says 'the nursling of His love'; God takes One who might be so affectionately described as that, His beloved Son, and not sparing Him but delivering Him up for us all - for unto us a Son is given.

These scriptures, beloved, all have their dispensational setting, all of which could be interpreted in its own time, but as you contemplate what is said in Isaiah 9 you cannot but be moved by the fact that God has given His Son in order that the unholiness which has been revealed in us on account of sins might be dealt with righteously and that He might pardon iniquity and thereby comfort souls. The greatest comfort that a soul can have is that its sins are forgiven, that its iniquity is pardoned. All this enters into the proclamation of the glad tidings into which Zion and Jerusalem are urged: "O Zion, that bringest glad tidings, ... O Jerusalem, that bringest glad tidings". These are the glad tidings that may be proclaimed from the beginning, I was going to say, of the gospel of Isaiah; and if you go on in the early chapters of Isaiah you will find that they embrace the next aspect, I may say, of the Christian gospel. In chapter 11 you find "And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall be fruitful; and the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him" (v.1). Now that was manifested when Jesus was here· chapter 4 of Luke brings out from another chapter in Isaiah that the Spirit of Jehovah was upon Him. And He was here the man upon whom the Spirit was. One can safely say that because in John 1 it says "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding on him, he... is the Son of God", (vv 33,34) and there He is identified as *the* man on whom the Spirit came. There were others of course in Old Testament times on whom, and to whom, the Spirit came with a view to particular activities or exploits. Here is a Man on whom the Spirit comes and abides, the man - "the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him". How blessed to think of Jesus like that! As has often been said, One with

whom the Spirit of God could wholly and restfully identify Himself. What blessedness to think of the Spirit finding a resting place for the sole of His foot, no longer on an olive tree but on a Man - how blessed!

Then, beloved, that same Spirit is available for us. If God in His infinite holiness has given His Son for us in order that every issue between Him and us might be resolved, He has also given His Spirit, and His Spirit may be upon us in order that His Spirit may be in us; the normal consequence of believing in Christ as dying for one's sins is that one receives the Holy Spirit. If you read on in the verses at the beginning of Isaiah 11 you will find that Spirit described: "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah" (v.2). That is the kind of spirit that you want; that is the kind of spirit that I want. These are things that you and I need; these are presentations of the way in which we need the Holy Spirit; we need Him also as the great Revealer of the things of God and the depths of God. Is there not a close similarity between the presentation in Isaiah 11 and the presentation of Paul to Timothy? - that "God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion", 2 Tim 1: 7. Think of what the Spirit, *the* Spirit, is to you, what He will be to you as you read through Romans 8, a resource for everything, a resource even against the flesh. And He comes to you as immense power; you are too weak to have any power yourself and the Spirit joins His help to your weakness. He does not join His help to your infirmity but to your weakness. And He is still a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and of might, of knowledge and of the fear of God. Do you know the Spirit like that, beloved? Is that what the anointing means to you, that you have the Spirit of God like that? You have known that you were a sinner, that your sins were as scarlet, that they were red like crimson, and you know that the holiness of God made this impinge on your soul, and then you turned to Christ the Child who was given, and the Son who was born, and you found, not through His birth but through His death, that God has been righteously able to deal with

your sins and has given you the Spirit that came to rest on Jesus. There is only one Spirit, the Spirit that came to rest upon Jesus now upon you as the anointing, or the Uncction now in you as power, but in you in all those great resources that Isaiah dwells on in chapter 11. It is remarkable how the Christian gospel is set out in order in the beginning of this prophecy.

In regard to Israel's history chapter 12 is perhaps the highest point they ever touch - "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitress of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee" (v 6). Israel will never touch anything higher than that. When they touch that they will acknowledge that God is Head over all, that wisdom and glory are from Him according to what David says to God in 1 Chronicles 29. When the Holy One of Israel is in the midst of them they will touch what God is as Head, not exactly in the way we know Christ as Head but acknowledging that everything stems from God - "riches and glory are of thee, and thou rulest over everything" (v 12). As we ourselves touch these experiences in spirit we find that God becomes to us what there is in that chapter, that Jehovah has become my strength and song, He has become my salvation; that is to say, you have power now to go along the Christian way; your sins have been dealt with, the holiness of God met, Christ having died and as we know having been raised, and the Spirit given - "Jehovah, is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" (v 2). One of the easiest hymns in the book to sing is 'All through this desert dry My path His footsteps trace'; one verse says 'My song is ever - God!'

How wonderful! "Jehovah, is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" is the highest point, as I say, that Israel will ever know, and comes back to the great chorus of Israel - what God has been in His loving-kindness. But for us, beloved, Jehovah is my strength and song and He is become my salvation. Do you know Him? Are all your days like that? Many, many things oppress us, many things tax us, and sometimes there are things that ought not to tax us but they do; really there are enough things that ought to tax us to squeeze out the things that ought not to tax us; they tax our minds and put strain and stress on us in various ways, but Jehovah is my

strength and song and He is become my salvation. You wonder at the general impression of the happy believer, that he is here as a person who sings - 'So cheers the spirit that the pilgrim sings'. Jehovah is my strength and song and He is become my salvation. Well, how has He become your salvation? By always giving you a way out of the area of stress and trial, depression and anxiety; the Name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runs into it and is safe (see Prov 18: 10). He is become my salvation. Beloved, has He become your salvation? It seems to be experimental in that chapter, He is become; is it experimental with you and with me? Many things come in to occupy our minds and prevent us getting back to sleep when we cannot sleep at night, but Jehovah is my strength and song and He is become my salvation. This is the normal activity of the Holy Spirit in the believer. The One who is the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah, is the One who will make you sing to Jehovah, the One who has triumphed gloriously, the One who has Himself become your salvation.

Then at that point Isaiah turns off and goes over the history of the nations up to chapter 25, the burden of this nation and of that, the woe of this nation and of that. God is taking up the isles, as this chapter 40 brings out, as a very small thing, the nations as the dust of the balance and a drop of the bucket. He deals with them all in holiness, but He deals with them in righteousness, He deals with every one, occasionally only in a few words; in the midst of the burden of one nation and another we suddenly get the burden of Dumah: "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? ... The morning cometh, and also the night", chap 21: 11. Very affecting the way in which that breaks in in the burdens of the nations! But you emerge from the burdens of the nations and their woe, the things which you might be occupied with from day to day. You may think of the burdens of this nation, things that God might well bring home to this nation, a nation that has a public acknowledgement of God. As I think I have remarked before, I am often reminded of Mr Darby's lines in regard to Christ that 'The pride

of careless greatness, Could wash its hands of thee'. Those are lines that could well describe the British Empire. That is largely what people have publicly done; but as you go through the burden of the nations you emerge with Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee because he trusts in Thee (see chap 26: 3). That is a soul that is already comforted, beloved, a soul that is already at rest with God and at rest in God. That expression is not peace with God according to Romans, it is more the peace of God according to Philippians. 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee': there is where the soul rests, the soul is at rest in God; how great it is to find the soul at rest in God! with God, but at rest in God. The soul that has found Jehovah to be its strength and song and for whom He has become its salvation touches that easily, readily; it is your normal home. How blessed! How little known, but beloved how readily available - perfect peace, the mind that is stayed on Thee.

It is not very long after that you come to the great triumphant chapter 35 where the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf be unstopped, and the lame shall leap as a hart. How does that chapter finish? "Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads". Beloved, what comfort in that! what triumph! the song that God has been becoming, in a certain sense, your anointing, everlasting joy upon your head. That is what Israel will come into, but beloved you could come into it now, you could have everlasting joy at the present time. These are the glad tidings of Zion, the glad tidings of Jerusalem; it is as if God says to Zion, get up as far as you can and proclaim it as far as you can. "O Zion, that bringest glad tidings, get thee up into a high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest glad tidings, lift up thy voice with strength: ... say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!". In chapter 6 the soul is brought into complete confusion on account of His holiness, but "Behold your God! " in chapter 40 is in rest and peace of a mind that is stayed on God. Beloved, this is the normal conclusion of the gospel, that the mind is stayed on God.

I trace this again: that you began in your sins, you met the holiness of God but then He gave His Son, and His Son having

accomplished His work He gave His Spirit, and then the soul is established, God Himself becoming its salvation, and the mind at peace and everlasting joy on our heads. No wonder He says "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people". The Christian gospel is in these early chapters. May the Lord bless it to us.

CROYDON

11 December 1977

SPEAKING AND HEARING

A.J.E.Welch

Ezekiel 1: 26-28; 2: 1, 2

These occasions, beloved brethren, have their challenge to us as to speaking and hearing. The great matter of communication, which so fruitfully occupied us some months ago, I feel encouraged to come back to, to think of the great extent of what this prophet is given, embracing such a variety of evidences of God's might and power and glory. We have the governmental side which is going on all the time, the hand of God upon it, His providential ways behind it, and we have in later chapters, as we know, the house, a divine dwelling, a prince and his glorious, suggestive movements. And in the midst of it all we have the suffering side, and the side of bereavement, in the beloved prophet himself. All this is taking place and communications are reaching him, and he is, in turn, setting them forward for the prospering of the people of God in spite of the captivity conditions, which he so feelingly accepts, but which do not hinder him in the prophetic communication of what is given him by the Spirit of God. His links with the Spirit are remarkably brought out in this book; he is a man who could be lifted up by a lock of his hair, a man who can be shown great things, things of which sometimes the bearing in detail is not at once apparent but which are all suggestive of God proceeding with what is before Him in the might of power, assuring His people so loved, in the midst of the existing conditions of captivity, that they are kept by way of such a prophet in the current of His own mind.

The vision which he records in this first chapter reaches a kind of climax in the verses read, and we should note the word 'above', "above the expanse that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it". The appearance of a man! as if the prophet is being reminded that God's thoughts of dominion in relation to the created

order of things stand related to man. We can see for ourselves how it looks on to Christ, Christ exalted, set in the place of supremacy, of power. I wonder, dear brethren, in the midst of conditions which, taken in their broad sense, are so mixed in our time, whether we have a view of Christ in what we could speak of as total pre-eminence upon the throne. How much the prophet apprehended of what this would for us look on to would be another matter, but he presents this to us, and it affects me tonight: "the appearance of a man above upon it"; that is to say, God has His throne unchallenged and unchallengeable, but He has a Man - how glorious that Man! how glorious in His Person! - who is totally competent to fill the throne and to exercise, as we may say, the functions of dominion which belong to the throne. This is a very great comfort in such days as we live in. And the prophet is communicating these things to us. We are challenged as to how much we can apprehend of the figures that he uses through the book and whether we can, so to say, intelligently assemble the many matters that he communicates to us, but it is opening up what is glorious on God's side in the midst of conditions which themselves are testing and occasion suffering and bereavement, and he is showing the wide scope, the glorious scope, of divine dealings. We are not to be narrow, dear brethren, in our apprehension of God in His supremacy but see the glorious scope of divine dealings and the precision with which every detail is, so to say, put into its place. I believe it just is designed to strengthen us in our apprehension of divine glory, to disentangle our minds and occupation with things which belong to a scene out of which Christ has gone by way of death and engage us with the great scene of divine supremacy which is brought into view for us in the Person of Jesus, a Man in total pre-eminence.

Then we have the side of the fire (not that I would seek to touch the detail); that is to say, the rights of God in judgment are to be seen and are to be maintained. For us again they call attention to Christ, what He has sustained in judgment, the resolving of every matter that reflects upon the divine glory in the work of God's Son. Could I say, the awfulness of His death and yet the decisiveness of it

as presenting to us the matter of judgment which, as we apprehend Christ, has reached the point of completion for us; that is to say, the side of divine judgment is there and is disclosed to us and we see the necessity for it (as we have often remarked, judgment is the necessity of divine love, that love might have the scene in which its rest and its satisfaction can be); but then, with the fire, there is the brightness round about. How wonderful the presentation of the matter to keep us in the sense of every unholy thing being put away - a fire! And we are to realise this, dear brethren. How much there is that needs to be just put away. How much we need the promotion of the holy feelings, the holy sensibilities, the holy discrimination, which is of God, to reject what is not of Him. But we see how blessed it is, the brightness round about is "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain", reminding us of the covenant-keeping God, of God in the depths of His thoughts for men which never change; a covenant-keeping God, if I could use that expression, to be seen there, to assure our hearts, to keep us steady, to keep us in the realisation that, whatever is taking place, divine government is proceeding in the midst of a scene where everything that is unholy appears and has to be seen to be what it is; and we have God in the blessedness of what He is as a covenant-keeping God, going back to a time when He was guarding, so to say, man for His pleasure.

So let us enter into these things, dear brethren, in the sense of divine glory, a glory which has necessitated the side of judgment; but in the introducing of all that has been perfectly secured in Christ there is the evidence, and not only the evidence but the glorious reality, of God toward us for blessing and the communication of His choicest thoughts. The prophetic scene of things here involves great pressure, great suffering for the prophet. We know how the sufferings of Christ have been spoken of on the basis of what this prophet presents to us, but lying behind all, and disclosed to the prophet, and disclosed by the prophet to those whom he serves, is the divine glory, and especially the Man above upon the throne. Let us get a view of Christ in supreme dominion and let us realise the assembly's place with Him according to the end of Ephesians 1, in

respect of His dominion, and let us see the Man above upon the throne.

So the prophet is strengthened. He said unto me "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee". What a comfort, dear brethren! "Stand upon thy feet"; that is to say, it is not a time to be relaxing exactly; be ready, as it were, for whatever the divine communication may involve. "And I will speak with thee. And the Spirit entered into me when he spoke unto me, and set me upon my feet; and I heard him that spoke unto me". Dear brethren, I believe our faithful God in all His love will sustain this speaking till the end; as we continue in faithfulness, He would assure us that He will speak with us, He will communicate to us. "I will speak with thee". Remember how that word 'with' came into those occasions in October. "I will speak with thee", as if God would have us with Him, and would assure our hearts that He delights to have us with Him, in the midst of this great scene, involving the pre-eminence and supremacy of Christ, the judgment of every unholy thing, the shining out of glory in God Himself as a God who keeps covenant and would assure us of all that is accomplished for blessing in Jesus.

May we be ready for communications, not only to receive them but to convey them, to carry forward in these wonderful closing moments what relates to the glory of the God whom we know. We know Him as Ezekiel never knew Him in the sense that this glorious day of the Spirit involves great fulness in the knowledge of God; so let us go in for that and be ready to speak and ready to hear, for His Name's sake.

LONDON

26 June 1979

GOD SEEKING

J.Renton

Luke 19: 9,10; 15: 8-10; John 4: 23,25

I just have an impression to speak to you this afternoon about God seeking. It is a wonderful thing, in fact it is an extraordinary thing, that God should be seeking. It is an unusual attitude on the part of the blessed God to be seeking persons. God who is all wise, all powerful, who sees and hears and knows everything, is seeking persons; that is remarkable. None of us would be blessed unless God was active in this attitude of seeking. We have read of the Son of man who has come to seek and save that which is lost. Think of man being lost! This is ridiculed by unbelieving scientific men around us in the world. Many educated men and women regard the description of the garden of Eden and man placed there and man's disobedience as a kind of fable. God placed man in the garden in order to get pleasure from him. Man was created for God's pleasure. There is a word in Revelation 4: "and for thy will they were, and they have been created" (v 11); that was God's purpose in creating men, but also, man has been lost because of the activities of Satan; the serpent in the garden instilled into the woman doubt as to God. The woman gave her ear to the serpent and Adam disobeyed; the serpent, cunningly, craftily got at man through the woman but both were involved in the fall. He suggested that God was not all Eve thought He was. The serpent succeeded in bringing a distance between man and God. It is an awful thing that God lost the confidence of man. No being has more right to man's confidence than God, but the serpent so intervened that man departed from confidence in God. That is where the distance came in, where the darkness came in, darkness and doubts as to God; such thoughts are in every human breast.

The gospel tells us that God is seeking the recovery of men and women and boys and girls. God is seeking the recovery of that which is lost, and in order to recover what was lost the Son of man

has come. Various reasons are given in Scripture why the Lord came and why He went into death, and one of them is that "the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which is lost". When Adam sinned, when the fall took place, God felt the loss far more than Adam did. It was God who said "where art thou?", Gen 3: 10. Adam never thought of saying regarding God, where art Thou? In fact, Adam and his wife were hiding themselves from God in the trees of the garden. You see thus the distance, the doubt as to God, the lack of confidence that the serpent was successful in instilling into the hearts of Adam and his wife. It was God who said "where art thou?"; it was God who felt the loss and it is God who is active in the recovery of that which was lost. By nature we are all lost, and if we have been found it is because of the activities of the Son of man, because He has come into manhood being in His Person God Himself. This morning those of us who broke bread worshipped the Lord Jesus because He is God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God", John 1: 1. The Word became flesh but it never altered the fact that He is God. How wonderful to think of the greatness of the Saviour, the Son of man, the Lord Jesus Christ! He was pleased to become a Man to seek and to save that which was lost. It meant, dear friends, that men were at a distance from God, and if we are at a distance from God, that distance had to be gone into by the Saviour Himself. If you could measure what it cost the Lord Jesus to be abandoned by God you would get some idea of the moral distance that there was between our souls and God. O how awful the darkness! How hopeless man's position! No one could recover himself and no one could recover his brother. There was only One who could effect the basis of the recovery of men and that was the Son of man. We read of His suffering at the hands of men, but there was also His suffering at the hand of God, becoming the sin bearer that the distance might not only be bridged but removed. God is presenting glad tidings from the standpoint of reconciliation having been accomplished. When the Son of man was here amongst men the distance was in a sense removed because He came near to men; in manhood the Lord Jesus came near. He was available to everyone who had need; He

was available for healing, for giving power, forgiving sins, for every human need. How remarkable that the Lord should come so near to men! But then He has sustained the abandonment, He has suffered the penalty of death, He has poured out His precious blood, He has been buried, that a righteous basis might be laid that men might be recovered. No one could be recovered apart from that tremendous work undertaken and completed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Every person needs a Saviour, every one who ever lived needs a Saviour. There is only One who did not need a Saviour and that was the Saviour Himself. There is only one Saviour; no matter what men say, there is only one Saviour; salvation is in none other. The Lord Jesus Christ raised from the dead by the glory of the Father and highly exalted is available as a Saviour. We might think it would have been simple to have been alive on the earth when the Lord was here and be able to touch Him as some persons did. The Lord Jesus personally touched certain persons and others touched Him. You might say how simple it would have been! But, dear friends, the Lord is more available where He is now as a Saviour than He was when He was here. The Lord moved in a very small area when He was here, geographically He covered very little ground, sixty miles I suppose from Galilee to Jerusalem, and if we were alive in this country we should have had to travel to Palestine; but you need not make any journey, you can contact the Lord where you are in this room, in your own room or wherever you may be at any time. The Lord is more available as Saviour in His present position than He was when He was here; He is available for *all* men. It calls for the exercise of faith; it is a matter of simply believing, simply trusting. We often speak about the Ephesians as being a remarkable company that lived in the time of the pristine glory of the assembly; how did they begin? You will find it in verse 13 of Ephesians 1: "the Christ; in whom ye also have trusted". They trusted the Saviour; that is how they began. O what a simple beginning! Paul was able to announce to them the whole counsel of God; they were ready to receive the fulness of the light of Christianity; but how did they begin? They trusted the Saviour. Just where you are, dear friend, you can lift up your heart and trust the Saviour. Maybe you are

burdened with your sins; if you are you can lift up your heart to the Saviour where He is. In fact in the preaching of the glad tidings the Saviour comes near to you. In the Spirit's power the Saviour presents Himself to you. If you are as yet an unbeliever and have not trusted Him the preaching of the glad tidings is a difficult position for you to be in; you have to thrust Him away because the preacher presents the Saviour to you as available to you now at this moment where you are. If you are burdened with the sense of your guilt and your need of a Saviour, lift up your heart now and trust Him. You can tell the one who sits next to you, I trust in Jesus as my Saviour. It is the basis on which your sins are forgiven. The Lord Jesus is the One who has the administration of the divine bounty, of all the blessings that God has in mind in the glad tidings beginning with the forgiveness of sins. The Son of man has made possible the way in which we who are lost can be recovered, found. There is no other way.

Then there is the Lord seeking now. The Lord said to Zacchaeus "To-day salvation is come to this house, inasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which is lost". The seeking is of that which was lost of the house of Abraham. While in one sense God is seeking in a universal way all men, there is a sense in which God is seeking certain persons, for the setting here of that which is lost is Zacchaeus and his house. In the glad tidings God is specific and particular and personal. While the glad tidings are available to all men, God speaks to individuals; He is speaking to you personally. The Lord is seeking Zacchaeus and his household. It is a good thing to take account of our households in that way; maybe some of our households are not all we would like them to be; let us think of the Lord seeking with a view to salvation. Reference was made this afternoon to the jailor: the word to him was "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house", Acts 16: 31. If we realise that the Lord is seeking certain persons, then maybe we will be on that line of seeking too. The Lord is very gracious and very patient in His seeking; He is of course very faithful too. Joseph

was sent out by his father to seek the welfare of his brethren, and someone asked him what his purpose was and he said "I am seeking my brethren", Gen 37: 15. Joseph acts with remarkable skill; he knows when to be firm and when to show grace. Joseph spoke roughly to them; that is, he was faithful with them, but he gave them their money back in their sacks; that was grace. What affected them more than the hard speaking was the fact that they received their money back; that upset them. We need to learn skill; sometimes we are hard when we should be gracious and sometimes we are gracious when we should be firm. Joseph was skilled; eventually he secured his brethren. It says "he kissed all his brethren" Gen 45: 15. What a fine conclusion! It is worthwhile setting ourselves to be with the Lord in His seeking and seek wisdom from Him to be faithful and yet to be gracious and secure the end He has in view.

Now in Luke 15 we have the woman seeking. She is suggestive of the Holy Spirit's activities. There is one drachma, one piece of silver, lost which was of great value to the woman. Maybe others would not think of it as of much value but this woman set her heart on the securing of this lost one. This lost drachma would no doubt suggest one who is a believer but not in circulation, not in function. If a piece of silver is yours and it is lost you may as well not have it, it is of no value until it is found. There may be many believers today who are not available for what the Spirit has in hand. It says "if she lose one drachma does not light a lamp". Light is needed; this coin is in darkness, maybe covered up with dust under some piece of furniture; the woman brings in light. Believers can be used by the Spirit to enlighten other believers. What a service we can render to fellow believers not available for what the Spirit has in mind, perhaps sitting at home! She lights a lamp and sweeps the house; she disturbs things, maybe sets some dust moving; the drachma may be covered up with dust; she sweeps the house and seeks carefully till she finds it. I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit is active at the moment in this kind of service, and He would look for some of us too to be more available to secure what God Himself

values so much. It is a very homely kind of parable: it is a woman and her house. It is a house she would know well; she would know every bit of furniture and every corner of the house, just as the Spirit knows all about us, and if we are not available as we ought to be He is seeking. He would bring light through the glad tidings, and He would disturb our consciences so that we might be discovered. Then, see the rejoicing that comes in: "and having found it she calls together the friends and neighbours". It is a fine thing to be found. If the owner has lost something of great value, O think of the joy he has when he finds it! Have we all been found? As believers we could be lost as far as the present activity of the Spirit is concerned because the Spirit would bring us into the current and the power of what is for the pleasure of God at this present time. It says "Rejoice with me, for I have found the drachma which I had lost. Thus, I say unto you, there is joy before the angels of God for one repenting sinner". The sweeping of the house and the seeking must affect the conscience because it brings about repentance as to the lost condition and of being out of circulation, and now there is recovery, a lost one is found. I trust we are all found; I trust we are all in the current operations of the Holy Spirit. There is blessing for the believer in being found and there is joy before the angels of God, joy in the presence of God when one is actually found.

Now John 4 shows that all is in view of the satisfaction of the Father. The glad tidings are meant to bring us into right relation with the Lord Jesus, into the possession and power of the Holy Spirit, and into right relations with the Father. This is the seeking of divine Persons not only for the blessing of the believer which is great and vast, but for the satisfaction of the heart of God Himself, the Father seeking such as His worshippers. Here was an unlikely person, as has often been said, this woman by the well of Sychar, a disreputable character possibly. It has been said that she came to the well when the other women would not come because she felt the reproach of her sinful history. She came there seeking water from the well, but there was the Lord Jesus seeking her in view of the satisfaction of the Father. What a privilege we have, dear friends, to

be here for the satisfaction of the blessed Father Himself! That will be eternal. We are to be secured now as one of the true worshippers, and this will go into eternity. It says here "the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for also the Father seeks such as his worshippers". This is not formal worship; this is worship in spirit and in truth. "In truth" would be in the great light of Christianity, of revelation, of God's purpose and of God's thoughts. "In spirit" would be reality with us, not formality; not merely nominal but in spirit and truth. May the Lord help us to be persons who are not only sought but found, secured and fully recovered, for the glory and pleasure of God.

LOCHGELLY

11 September 1977

THE CHILDREN'S FORGIVENESS

A perfect fulness marks the forgiveness of God. Believers on the Lord Jesus who were in Colosse were assured by Paul in his epistle to them that all their offences had been forgiven them. Their sins, as indeed ours also, had stood out against them in the sight of heaven like the note of a debt in the handwriting of the person owing it. But the Scripture says about this writing that Jesus, in dying, "nailed it to the cross". This refers to an ancient Eastern custom. When a debt was settled, the written evidence of it was crossed through and nailed to the door of the debtor. In this way heaven and earth could witness that there was no longer any debt owing. How happy must the debtor have been!

The forgiveness of God is free, not only in being costless to us, but in that it is so readily granted for the sake of the name of Jesus. The Scripture speaks of the "remission" of sins, meaning that our sins are 'sent away' as not belonging to us because He has borne them. In the type of the day of atonement a goat's blood was shed to represent a covering for sins, but also those sins were confessed over the head of another goat which carried them away to a land without inhabitants. This had to be repeated yearly whereas the sacrifice of Christ to which it looked forward has complete and eternal value.

We can therefore thankfully say that forgiveness has been secured for us by the blood of Christ, is received by us through the faith that God gives and is assured to us by His word in the Scriptures. It is by the riches of His grace that these things are so; by the glory of His grace He takes the believer into His favour in the Beloved - the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle John wrote to those whom he lovingly called his children because their sins were forgiven them "for his name's sake". Even the little children who might not understand these things had the privilege of knowing the Father from whom all blessing comes. Do you?

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