

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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A NARROW WAY

John 14: 6; Ephesians 2: 18; Ephesians 3: 14-21

E.C.B. We have referred this morning to the scriptures in Ephesians but, in a sense surprisingly, the Lord's word in Matthew came to my mind - "narrow the gate and straitened the way that leads to life" (chap 7: 14). I was thinking that the way in which we come to the Father is really a narrow way. In John 14 the Lord shuts it up to Himself; nothing could be more narrow than the way He prescribes in verse 6 of that chapter: "No one comes to the Father unless by me". Access to the Father is in that scripture closed up except by Christ. While however the access there is closed up, yet the Lord opens up something entirely new. While the Lord prescribes that a man can come only by Himself - "the way, and the truth, and the life" - yet what such an one is brought to is something entirely new. This is not exactly the antitype of the approach of the high priest or anything of that order; coming to the Father is something entirely new and yet the gate is narrow and the way is straitened.

I was reflecting this morning as we were together on the word 'access' in Ephesians 2. Access is a narrow idea; you do not stand on the prairies and look across on the rest of the prairies and say you have access to the prairies; everything is wide open. We used to be taught in geography in school that Winnipeg gave you access to the prairies, and that idea narrows it down. Winnipeg may be a sizeable city but in that expression it narrows access down. When we talk about access it implies the idea not exactly of a wide open gate but of a narrow way. Paul seems to amplify it in Ephesians 2 by saying "through Christ", which connects again with John 14, but "by one Spirit". But still it is 'access', as if it is a narrow way. Then what does it lead to? It leads to life; and I wondered if the life was in the end of chapter 3, because as soon as Paul has access he bows his knees to the Father; he has access to the Father and then things open up. It is not as if we have access through, for instance, the outside door here into a narrow passage that brings us into a relatively small area, but we come by the access of Ephesians 2 into

an area that we cannot compass - "breadth and length and depth and height". We have access to the love of the Christ and to the fulness of God. In Matthew 7 Jesus says "Enter in through the narrow gate". I wondered whether these things might suggest something to us to inquire into, that the way into the Father is in a certain sense narrow, but once we have come that way we find that we have what the life really means.

A.B.P. I am thankful that you have brought this up because I have tried to reconcile this and Hebrews 10. Hebrews 10 is antitypical of the Aaronic priesthood and that relates particularly to the wilderness, whereas this is the highest privilege that we will ever know until we are in glory.

E.C.B. The types of course help us, and Hebrews helps us a great deal as to the interpretation of the types and there is a new and living way, but even that way is straitened. It is not a great wide open path. One speaks carefully in these things but the way is reduced to Christ, the only way.

A.B.P. It is so in Hebrews also. But you were indicating that this is something new, not antitypical, whereas Hebrews 10 is antitypical and I was just trying to reconcile the two. I can see that Hebrews particularly relates to wilderness conditions.

E.C.B. I am sure that is right. John 14 is something new; if you had been there and Jesus had said something that implied that you could come to the Father, what a new thing it would have seemed. In chapter 4 He talks about worshipping the Father, and you might be like the publican who stood afar off and be worshipping, but in chapter 14 He says, You can come to the Father. I think that is something that we need to explore the potentiality of. The access is narrow, it is narrowed down to Christ, the way is straitened to Himself, but then it is to the Father that you come and it is something entirely new, and as you say, there is no type of it.

G.D.W. How would you distinguish between access and right? I am thinking of Revelation 22: 14: "that they may have right to the tree of

life, and that they should go in by the gates into the city". Would they be parallel thoughts or would one precede the other?

E.C.B. In a certain sense they are parallel but they belong in different settings. In Revelation it is a question of washing your robes, which touches responsibility; indeed that scripture bears on fellowship. Unless persons have washed their robes you have not fellowship with them; that needs to be categorically understood. But this is the way into the Father. As Mr Parker says it is what we speak of as privilege, and there is the liberty to go in, but you have to confine yourself in this way. It is different from the highpriestly system of the old dispensation where only the priest went in. Now things are opened up but they are opened up through a narrow way. I know the Lord's word applies particularly to us testimonially but I thought that it bore on what we experience even in the service of God, that we come this way by a gate that is narrow and a way that is straitened and we enter into life. But Jesus begins that paragraph by saying "Enter in through the narrow gate"; and I think that is what He would say to us in the service of God.

C.S.E. In John 10 the Lord speaks of Himself as the door: "I am the door: if any one enter in by me, he shall be saved, and... shall find pasture" (v 9); and later on He says "that they might have life, and might have it abundantly", (v 10). Is that a similar thought: you enter through Christ but then there is a wide area that is opened up afterwards which the thought of 'abundantly' would bring before us?

E.C.B. I think that is right. Mr Raven taught that in John 10 the Lord is the door out of the world. By being the door out of one thing He is the door into something else. But *He* is the door - out of the world, but if you go through that door you come into the area where there is more abundant life. And where is our life if it is not in the realm of breadth and length and depth and height? The life of the Christian is not confined to limited things, to small numbers and what may be possible in a broken day; the life of the Christian is in the area of breadth and length and depth and height. We need to feel the release into that area that the Lord would give us as we come by Him.

A.B.P. And "with all the saints".

E.C.B. Certainly; I think we have a lot of difficulty about that, gathering up all saints and at the same time holding in our minds the principles that govern fellowship. But all the saints are needed for that area of life.

A.B.P. I have often thought about the priest of Midian and his daughters who came to him; they came to the Father in principle; they had been helped but he says "where is he?" Exod 2: 20. This access through Christ seems to indicate that we should never be in the service of praise in the sense of being in the presence of the Father without realising that the Lord Jesus is there too.

E.C.B. I think that very much.

A.B.P. I felt sometimes that our response to the Father seems to be taken up to a substantial degree with our own blessings and that we sort of leave the Man behind. What you are bringing before us would help.

E.C.B. As we come by Him who is the way and the truth and the life we learn things about Him and we carry those things with us into the Father's presence. My mother used to tell us, admittedly it was in connection with the gospel, that you never forget the bridge that carried you across. And you never forget that by which you have access. As you come into the Father's presence you never forget Christ; as you say, you do not leave the Man behind. But I am impressed with the fact that the access is really narrowed down. It is wide enough for all but it is narrowed down; even in Ephesians 2 it is narrowed down to Him and the power of one Spirit; there is no other way. I think the end of chapter 3 connects with it, that as soon as you have come through the access and you bow your knees to the Father in whose presence you then are, you find that you are in a realm that you cannot measure.

B.T. This is very interesting, because the Lord was about to leave them here and they were troubled and He was reassuring them as to what was in His Father's house; and not only that but what was available currently through Himself, this access.

E.C.B. Yes, and in a certain sense He sets this out for the disciples, because He says, I am going to the Father and you can come to the Father, but you will not come unless you come by Me. He was so well known to them, and He was giving them that comfort, that He would go away not only to prepare them a place but to prepare the access as well. So they would have no difficulty as they came by Him to the Father, and yet what a new thing, the sense that you can come to the Father! Of course we learn it, the children are taught it - thank God that they are taught to turn to the Father about things - but it is a new thing, yet it is really the whole of Christianity, that you can come to the Father.

C.S.E. Why do you say it is a new thing? Would you elaborate a little more on that.

E.C.B. It is a thing that was not known in the previous dispensation. God had certainly said "Israel is my son, my first born", Exod 4: 22. He did not actually say it to the people; he sent a message through Moses to Pharaoh. It is a remarkable thing that God's claim on His people as His son was made to Pharaoh, the people were not exactly told it. But the whole of that system of worship is a system of distance. One man could go in, but the common people could not get into the holy place let alone the holiest of all where the immediate presence of God was. But in the present day that Jesus was setting on, it is not only that the Father is known, has been declared and is known, but that you can come to the Father. I think that is something that would strike you as very new. Jesus says to the woman in chapter 4, The hour is coming and now is when you will worship the Father. Now that is one thing, but as He goes on teaching the disciples (and this is all intimate - I think Mr Stoney says these chapters were expressed at the supper table) Jesus says you can come to the Father; I am going to the Father and you can come to the Father. I think that is something new.

A.R.S. Would a grasp of what you are saying help us in the testimonial scene to accept the narrow way because it leads into life and to what is expansive?

E.C.B. It would certainly help us in the testimonial sphere; that is what the Lord's word immediately refers to, and in that setting it is a way that we do not like much. We do not like the narrow gate and the straitened way for the testimony, and sometimes we are trying to elbow it a little bit wider, but that is not in the scripture in Matthew. I thought it would help us positively in regard to our approach to the Father that the gate is narrow; it consists of one Man and the way is straitened - "I am the way" - but coming that way you enter into life.

It helps to dwell a bit on the detail of scripture; that paragraph in Matthew refers to the broad gate and the way that leads to destruction but Jesus does not begin the paragraph with that, He begins with "Enter in through the narrow gate". I think that is the kind of thing He would have said to us this morning in the service: "Enter in through the narrow gate", but I am the gate. Then things open out into a fulness that we can hardly understand.

G.D.W. Does this show that the focal point of all God's ways is in Jesus? There is no one else. People try their own way but everything is in Christ.

E.C.B. Yes. God has made Him the focus, as you say, of all His thoughts and He has established Him as the Mediator of God and men, but He has also established Him as the Declarer of the Father; and we come through Him as the Declarer of the Father and we find that if we come by Him as the way, and the truth, and the life, life is immediately before us.

A.B.P. Would it be right to say that up to this point it has been mainly a question of the Father coming to us or being brought to us, even in manifestation in Jesus Himself, and now the point is that we have access to that Person who has come into expression?

E.C.B. That is right. In a certain sense chapter 13 and "part with me" is a transitional point in John's gospel. As you say, up to this part of the gospel it has been a question of God being declared and God being made known in Christ, known in His disposition towards men and especially towards men as individuals, women too as individuals; then things are gathered together into the flock and

Jesus talks about "part with me". In chapter 14 He begins to illuminate what that means. Chapter 13 bears on the testimony as well - but "part with me" is discovered in that He is the way of approach to the Father. As Mr Ben Taylor was saying, Jesus was going away; He says, I am going and you can come but you must come by Me.

A.B.P. They have a preliminary taste of that in the twelfth chapter in part with Him. Lazarus was one of those that sat at table with Him and we can tell by the context that the disciples were there too.

E.C.B. Yes, but that section takes you only as far as having part with Jesus Himself, it does not take you as far as the Father.

A.B.P. I understand that. I got an impression as to that this morning and was just seeking to fill it out a little. In chapter 13 He says that He washed the feet of the disciples that they might have part with Him, indicating that there was something that He was giving them at the supper level which was beyond what they had experienced in chapter 12.

E.C.B. I think just that. Then in chapter 14 and onwards He begins to enlarge that. So the scope of chapters 14 to 16 in relation to the Father is embraced in this; that in the Father's house are many mansions, but you can come to the Father and then the Father Himself has affection for you.

G.D.W. The link with what Mr Parker is speaking of seems to be in chapter 13: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands, and that he came out from God and was going to God" (v 3). John is in the secret of this and is able to write it down.

E.C.B. Yes, but Jesus also says "I leave the world and go to the Father", chap 16: 28. And in chapter 17 He says, in the hearing of disciples, "I come to thee" (v 11). Earlier Jesus had said, You can come but you come by Me. I think chapter 17 taken with this presents Him in the sense that He is in Hebrews the Forerunner, not the Forerunner going into God but the Forerunner going into the Father. Does that connect with what you thought?

B.T. Yes. Martha said "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day", John 11: 24 - His coming again (of course He has not come corporeally) but this would reassure them that, although He was leaving them, the way was open currently for them to be with Him.

E.C.B. So more than once in John's gospel He expresses this "where I am ye also may be" (chap 14: 3); "where I am, there also shall be my servant" (chap 12: 26); "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me", chap 17: 24. And He had gone before as Forerunner. It is a very blessed thought that He has gone as Forerunner to the Father as well as Forerunner to God, and that is in order to bring us into the reality of the experience that His place with the Father is our place with the Father.

A.G.S. Is that the reason why He said to Philip, "He that has seen me has seen the Father", John 14: 9?

E.C.B. That is so; that is what was in Jesus when He was down here: of course the knowledge of the Father is in Him, as the knowledge of God is in Him. But He says, I leave the world and go away to the Father, and now Father, I come to Thee. But He had already said - and an intelligent disciple would remember it - You can come provided you come by Me. I think He is showing them that there is a narrow gate and a straitened way, but it leads to life; and the life of a Christian is in the knowledge of the Father.

B.T. He was straitened Himself and cut off and had nothing. That would bring out our appreciation of Him as the way.

E.C.B. That is helpful. "How am I straitened" (Luke 12: 50)! - and if I could use the expression, it is in the straitened Man that we have access to the Father. He is not straitened any more but He has been through that straitened way and that is the way that we have access to the Father. I do not refer to that scripture so much to bring in the implication of suffering which is in Matthew 7 as to the narrowness of the way. You can come only one way, but if you come you find that there is an expanse beyond you.

A.B.P. Paul speaks of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (see 2 Cor 4: 6). Is that an impression that he received when he was in the third heaven? He had gone so to speak through the narrow way and was in the area where Christ is known as He is in heaven, in contrast to what you were saying, that the disciples had seen Him here in humility. How could the apostle give an expression like that if he had not witnessed something?

E.C.B. It may be that he saw it, as you say, in the third heaven. He may also have later come to understand what it was he actually saw on the Damascus road, that is the light above the brightness of the sun, not just the glorified Christ but God's glory in the face of the One who was revealed to him. Because, as you will remember, each time he speaks about it it is enhanced in his view.

A.S.H. I was thinking as to one divine Person linking on with Another. Another scripture says "No one can come to me except the Father who has sent me draw him", John 6: 44. Would that link on with your thought?

E.C.B. That scripture taken with this shows how divine Persons, as we speak of Them, are all working together for an end which satisfies Them; the Father draws to Christ and Christ brings to the Father those whom the Father has drawn to Him, and thus things work for the glory of the Father. I think this bears on what Mr Parker said earlier, that sometimes our familiarity with the service of God almost leads us to think that we approach the Father doctrinally, but we do not; we approach the Father through Christ and by one Spirit. 'By one Spirit' involves power, and thus as you come through this straitened way you come in power and you find there both the Man and the power able to sustain you where otherwise you would be lost.

A.B.P. And that power comes as we gaze upon the glory of the Lord, according to 2 Corinthians 3.

E.C.B. We are changed by that. We used to hear a lot more of that scripture than we do now. (It is a very interesting study how some scriptures are before the brethren for a long time and then they kind

of disappear. When did you last hear a reading on Genesis 24 for instance? And yet there was a time when we had it very frequently.

We become familiar with things and then they kind of fall away). We need to learn the reality of our approach to the Father in the power of one Spirit. I thought this morning that we are almost laden with more power than we can bear as we come in the power of one Spirit. The infinity of the power of the Spirit is beyond us.

A.Macd. I was just going to ask if we need the power of the blessed Spirit to understand the dimensions in any way. It is a narrow way, but when we get into this sphere it is tremendous and full of glory, and apart from the Spirit we would not be able to stand it, would we?

E.C.B. No we could not; nor could we be sustained in it, and yet as we approach through Christ and in the power of one Spirit we have the power to sustain a place there. I think that it is in the presence of the Father that we learn more about the love of the Christ than anywhere else. We may think that we learn most of the love of Christ circumstantially, but I think we learn it most before the Father. Do you think that?

A.Macd. I am sure that is true.

A.B.P. Open it up a little please.

E.C.B. We think about the love of Christ even in regard to our circumstances, and we appreciate such aspects of it as "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me", Gal 2: 20. Then we think of the love of Christ that cares for us all the time in a priestly way; but the place where we apprehend that the love of the Christ surpasses knowledge is in this area where we are bowing our knees to the Father, and are in a sphere the immensity of which in itself makes us dependent on the love of the Christ. We then realise that that love is sufficient for the sphere in which we are.

A.B.P. Is that when we get past the throne room and into the family room?

E.C.B. Yes, it is. I have wondered whether we are exactly in the sense of the throne in the service of God. There is One who sits on

the throne but we are not altogether in the sense of the Father's throne and Christ sitting on it; we are more in the sense of the family, and Christ's service then is not so much as sitting on the Father's throne but as conducting us around and showing us the blessedness of the Father's house. Do you think that?

A.B.P. I do very much. I have often wondered why we use the expression about the Lord being victorious and the indication of the great battle He has been in, and so forth. While this is all essential for us so as to have part with Him, what He is seeking to bring us into is the area which Mr Taylor used to speak of where love is at home, where it is flowing between Father and Son, and Son and Father, and the Father and the saints, and the saints and the Father - that mutual flow of love in the Father's house.

E.C.B. I think that. I think that the sense of the Lord as Victor comes to us as the Lord comes to us. As the hymn says, 'As the Victor Thou art known, coming in amongst Thine own' (No 147); He comes in as victorious. But He is not exactly holding us on that line. What we speak of as the marital aspects of things do not really relate to conflict; they relate to settled enjoyment.

A.B.P. The reference you made to His coming in would be to set us free.

E.C.B. Yes, the hymn indeed says that. I think we have an impression of the Lord as Victor as He comes in but the Lord saying "Peace be to you" (John 20: 19), implies that victory had been accomplished, He then opens up a scripture (which I again take out of its immediate context) "the things that are for thy peace", Luke 19: 42.

L.MacF. Just to go back, discipleship seems to be a very important thing in relation to what you are saying. He came to where the disciples were and they were glad having seen the Lord. Would all this be preparatory to the access we are speaking of?

E.C.B. I think that discipleship helps us to learn more about Jesus as the One through whom we have access. We do not quite go in to the Father as disciples but we learn a lot about Jesus as disciples

and it was to those who were disciples that He came. But once the Lord begins to move us into the sphere of privilege the idea of discipleship is left and we enter into the area of friendship and companions and His assembly. As you rightly say, discipleship helps us in the preparation.

B.T. When Rebecca said "I will draw water for thy camels also" (Gen 24: 19) there was appreciation of the power, the great carrying power; and although the way is narrow, as you say, there is activity along that way, over against what is passive.

E.C.B. That is right. "By one Spirit" is in the power of one Spirit, which helps us in unity, but it conveys to us that we do not enter the presence of the Father passively, as you say, but in a kind of vigour.

I think the power of one Spirit is a greater power than we can probably apprehend. Very rarely do we experience the full power of the Spirit because of the inhibitions on our side. Later on Paul would say "Be filled with the Spirit", Eph 5: 18..

I thought that in chapter 3 something of what life really is is brought before us; it is "narrow the gate and straitened the way that leads to life". If you run on from the thought of access to the Father (there is much else that is brought in in between) Paul's next reference to the Father is "I bow my knees to the Father". You would say that was natural; you have access, you take advantage of the access and the Father is before you and you bow your knees to the Father; that is a spiritually natural activity. Now things begin to unfold. Paul says "I bow my knees to the Father"; it does not exactly say he is praying but "I bow my knees to the Father"; it may convey more the idea of submission to the Father, He says "I bow my knees to the Father... in order that he may give you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man; that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love, in order that ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge; that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God".

Now what better description of life according to God could you have

than that? It is not just presented in a word, it is broken up for us so that we can the more readily get some impressions about it.

A.B.P. If we think of this access objectively, Paul brings in the experience of it subjectively, does he not? "Strengthened with power by his Spirit" and "that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts" would be, so to speak, the subjective substance in those who have access.

E.C.B. I think so. Of course it all leads at the end of the chapter to there being glory to Him in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages. That can only be in persons in whom there is life. I am just wondering about the way one can illustrate this; it is a little bit like finding a doorway high up in a castle wall; you are inside, you open the door and outside there is infinity, there is a great drop below you and a great height above you and you can see the country for miles expanding around. But you can step out into this realm in security because there is the upholding power of the Spirit and the anchorage of the love of the Christ. One tries to illustrate these things so that we may more simply grasp them, but spiritual things are not easily illustrated by natural means.

C.S.E. I was impressed with the line you are on because about two weeks ago Mr Welch was helping us on a similar line in Ephesians 1: 17 where it says "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him, being enlightened in the eyes of your heart". As you are saying, it brings us into a wide, vast, full area of things which we have with the Father. It just uplifts one's spirit to think of what we have been brought into through Christ.

E.C.B. Well, this is life; "straitened the way that leads to life", and Jesus says "Enter in through the narrow gate", and He would tell us that all these things are there. One practical consequence is that it leads to great variety of expression in response to the Father in the service of God. It would save us from the regular language that we use, all safe in its place - that is why we use it so much - but it would

take you in spirituality into things that you find yourself expressing freshly because you have learned what life is beyond this access.

G.D.W. When you say you have learned, this brings me back to the subjective question Mr Parker was referring to. Is there a suggestion in this that there might be a pattern? I am thinking of what Paul does; "I bow my knees to the Father". It would be a great thing if you had one or several brothers in a locality who would so bow their knees that these things might be true in our localities. I am not saying there are not but it is just the pattern of this beloved apostle.

E.C.B. That is so. Of course if you make a remark like that you tend to expose yourself to the reply that Mr Darby's father gave him, do you not?

G.D.W. A very good reply too.

E.C.B. 'Make it better by one man'. It is a thing that we can all take on and could go in for. It needs submission to the Father and to the Spirit and then you find there is room for great expansion. If you connect this with Isaac's history it belongs to the time when the strife was over. They dug a lot of wells and the Philistines came and filled them in and they gave them all quarrelsome names, and then they found another well, Rehoboth, and they did not strive for that and the name of that well means Broadways; that is to say, you have at least reached the breadth; you have the length and the depth and the height to come but you have at least reached the breadth in a well where the strife is ended. There is much we can think about in that regard because if we can touch the Spirit beyond the struggle with the flesh, or the flesh's struggle with the Spirit, then we find that we are free in these things.

A.S.H. Would you say a little as to the families "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named".

E.C.B. The families as I understand it relate to those that the Father has taken up in the course of all the ways of God. Every dispensation has yielded a family, but I think they fit very well into the many abodes in the Father's house, every family will find its place

there. Yet the remarkable thing is that in the Father's house each has its place but they are all contained within the same structure. I think you need eternity to apprehend it fully. The Father's house in John 14 I suppose would run on to eternity, but in eternity where everything has become spiritual it is much easier to understand the assimilation of all the families into their own place because they have become spiritual and are now beyond the distinctions which related to them in flesh and blood.

A.B.P. Does tabernacling with men imply that what is greatest in the sense of intelligent understanding and feeling, as would be related to this dispensation, would be the nearest family? It is somewhat similar to the set-up of the tribes in the land in relation to the temple, is it not?

E.C.B. In Ezekiel you mean? I think it is in that sense. There is much in Ezekiel's temple which is mysterious in its structure but it very much more fits with the idea of the Father's house with many abodes than does either the tabernacle or Solomon's temple.

A.B.P. I was thinking that it seems to be God's mind in dwelling to have that which is most understanding, if I might put it that way, in proximity.

E.C.B. I am sure that that is so. And there is certainly a sense (we use these words carefully because we have to use them in regard to Christ) in which the assembly has a mediatorial position in relation to other families. Is that how you understand it?

A.B.P. That is the way I understand the millennial day particularly.

E.C.B. I do not think that the assembly's prime place is lost in eternity, yet the other families are brought into positions of immense blessing to them in spirituality. Israel has very great difficulty in understanding spirituality, as I understand the Scriptures; they understand what is material, but after the world to come they will pass into what is spiritual and will find their ultimate satisfaction there.

C.S.E. Is there a sense of climax reached in chapter 3 of Ephesians where as soon as the apostle bows his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ he goes on "to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man; that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts". All three divine Persons converge in that area. Is that like a climax of worship?

E.C.B. I think that is right. The sense of movement at the end of Ephesians 3 is very rapid; you are not taken chapter by chapter over things. We have threeday meetings on different stages of this, but Paul covers it in about ten lines and goes from bowing his knees to the Father to the fulness of God in a moment. That shows the rapidity of the style and the rapidity of what is possible, but it requires the power and fulness of the Spirit to make it effective.

A.B.P. It was certainly a narrow way that Paul went through physically. He wrote this in prison, did he not? And he encases the chapter between the two references to his being a prisoner, which seems to help us to understand by contrast.

E.C.B. Yes. Sometimes you find a scripture comes to your mind which is written in an entirely different context and yet it seems to illuminate something that we customarily look at elsewhere. And I was just struck this morning that narrow is the way but it leads to life. Now what is life? Jesus says earlier in John's gospel: "ye will not come to me that ye might have life", chap 5: 40. There can be no greater life than to be filled with all the fulness of God. While Paul refers to God being able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think, implying that he was praying, yet I think that "I bow my knees to the Father" is really more the sense of the power that the Father bestows on those who submit to the Father in His glory. It seems to me something like the idea of obeisance to the king or the queen in England when they are crowned.

A.B.P. You mean that that would be the feelings that he had, but at the same time he was praying for the saints that they might enter into it.

E.C.B. That is certainly what he was doing. But "I bow my knees to the Father... in order that" is almost like coming to the Father and bowing before Him and then the Father anointing you with power in order to experience the greatness of what is in His realm.

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Key to initials (*October and current issue*)

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DAVID'S KINGDOM

E.C.Burr

2 Samuel 8: 15-18; 9: 1

I do not suppose there is anybody here who has not at some time in their life been attracted by the history of David. Certain men in the Old Testament stand out in our knowledge because their history is presented so attractively and so simply. I expect in Genesis most people here know more about Joseph than they do about Abraham, and in Samuel more about David than about Saul; and elsewhere we could look in the Old Testament and find men who are presented by the Spirit attractively to us so that we may have our attention drawn in relation to them and then find, as the Spirit helps us, that their history is not given to us on their account alone so that we may learn about them as you could for instance about George Washington or Abraham Lincoln or somebody like that, but they are presented to us in order to bring before us features which we shall find perfectly set out later in the Lord Jesus. I am sure that one reason why the Spirit has made certain men in the Old Testament especially interesting to us is that He saw in them things that were later going to be interpreted for us and enlarged upon in the Lord Jesus Himself. That would be a way that the Spirit works, to make a man interesting and attractive to us so that as we think about him and begin to learn about him we may later have our attention drawn to the One whom he anticipated and whatever qualities there were in him, were later set out in their fulness in Christ. Of course the gospel is not about David, and it is not about Joseph, the gospel is not even about Abraham or Isaac or Jacob or any of these worthy men; the gospel is about Christ. Now as the Spirit has recorded the Scriptures He has given us a shorter part in the New Testament and a much longer part in the Old, and preachers often draw on the Old Testament because it has a lot of things in it which can effectively be drawn on for the preaching without attracting you to a man, but presenting a man to you, as James says "a man of like passions to us" (chap 5: 17), so that in him you can readily see things that you will later find in Christ.

But I just say this again, that the gospel is not about David, it is about Jesus.

Now this does not hinder me from speaking about David. One thing I am going to do as I speak about a part of David's history (and I specially want to come to the verses that I have read - you might actually wonder why I have read those particular verses with all those names in - but I have something to say about them) is to go back a bit and tell you that several things in David's history fit into Luke's gospel. That should begin to be a bit more interesting, because the application and interpretation of Scripture is very interesting in itself.

David is fairly old by this time. It is difficult to say exactly how old he was because we are not told how old he was when he was anointed. I was doing a little calculation in my mind and thinking that if David was not very old when he was anointed - suppose he was in his early teens or something like that - then Saul reigned for forty years, and David had already been on the throne for a little while, and I was led to think that David in this chapter where I read may even be just about my age. These things help you to think about a man in the reality of the circumstances in which he was. But if we go back to the beginning of David's history, the first occasion when he comes to our notice is, as we well know, when God sent Samuel to anoint a king among the sons of Jesse. What a wonderful day that was! It must have been a wonderful day for Jesse's house, yet nobody there really seemed to understand the greatness of the day. In fact when Samuel came they were all rather frightened. He brought a heifer with him, but he came simply to anoint a king among the sons of Jesse. We well know that Jesse produced his first seven sons and over them God said "Neither has Jehovah chosen this one", 1 Sam 16: 8. And then he said "Are these all the young men?" Oh, said Jesse, "There is yet the youngest remaining, and behold, he is feeding the sheep. And Samuel said... Send and fetch him; for we will not sit at table till he come hither". When he was brought in he was beautiful and of a ruddy countenance and God said "Arise, anoint him; for this is he". That is Luke 3, Jesus coming to the

baptism, and the Spirit came upon Him and He was anointed. Not many people knew evidently about the anointing of David but everyone who was there to see, if they had any spiritual penetration at all, would apprehend that something new had begun when Jesus was anointed by the Spirit. That, I say, is Luke 3: Jesus is anointed.

Now another interesting thing is this; David did not begin to do anything particularly spectacular or distinctive the moment that he was anointed, but he was anointed in view of the place that he was going to have. In Luke 3, Jesus, if I could use the expression carefully, having so little time before Him, immediately begins to be active in service to God. If you read on in chapter 16 of the first book of Samuel where David was anointed, the next instance that you find is this: a rather bad tempered man, Saul; he was in a difficult day and they said, We want a man who is skilful in playing the harp. And someone who was there said, I know a man, a son of Jesse, who is skilful in playing the harp. And as you come to the end of that chapter, they sent for David. It was not now "Arise, anoint him; for this is he" and "We will not sit at table till he come hither", but there was no possibility of peace and rest until David was brought in to play with his harp. And that, brethren, is Luke 4: they "wondered at the words of grace which were coming out of his mouth" (v 22).

What were the words of grace? "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor". Let us never forget that that was the first thing. The first thing was not that the deaf heard and the lame walked and the blind saw, but the first thing was "he has anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor". On another occasion, when John the baptist, rather depressed, wondered what was taking place and if Jesus was really the One who was to come or whether they were to look for another, he gets a message, Tell John what you have seen and heard; how that deaf hear, lame walk and the poor have the glad tidings preached to them (see chap 7: 22). What a great thing that is! Never forget that the great characteristic of the present day is that the poor have the glad tidings preached to them. And, beloved, do not stop preaching; preach better, and pray that you might preach better, and

preach the gospel. It does not say that the poor have an outline of the truth or an abstruse outline of some scripture presented to them; they have the glad tidings preached to them. Therefore, beloved, let us in our day preach the gospel, and let it be the gospel in its simplicity and its power. The brethren love it and you might be used by God as you preach the gospel, you might even be used for the conversion of a sinner. What a privilege that would be, a privilege very little known among us! Most of the work of God goes on apart from us; it goes on apart from anything that we have done or in any way intervened in or been used for. But what a privilege it is to have any part in the conversion of a sinner! Do you not wish, beloved, that you had been used for the conversion of a sinner? Have you any greater ambition than that? Would you sooner be a ministering brother than someone through whom someone had been converted? Which will have the greater result eternally? Which will? Ask yourself? One should not decry ministry, but to have been used for the conversion of a soul is a very remarkable and outstanding privilege: the poor have the glad tidings preached to them. And I connect David playing with the harp with "the words of grace which were coming out of his mouth".

Now in David's history things move on very quickly to the great challenge. Hardly has he put his harp down than Goliath is challenging the armies of the living God; he says, Give me a man that we may fight together. And there are the people of Israel threatened with oppression and bondage, threatened that they will be brought into captivity by this man who is waving armaments over them against which none of them could do anything. There was not a weapon in Israel equal to the weapon that Goliath had. Goliath, as far as I can see in the scripture, had a weapon and no one in Israel could do anything about it. Now Goliath does not belong in Luke, he belongs in Hebrews, and David's action in the slaying of Goliath belongs to this; "And might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage", Heb 2: 15. That is the state of man, beloved, and he who has the might of death wields a weapon that nobody can do anything about; none

of us have a weapon against the might of death. I know that physically the doctors have very great skill and you sometimes think it is a wonder that people are still alive after what they have been through. We might even think of our beloved young brother in Plainfield, it is a miracle that he is still alive; and medical skill may in a certain sense postpone death; but that is all it does, it postpones it. It may give you a few more years like Hezekiah; it may give you a few more years that you can enjoy, and something may enter into your life in those few extended years that seems to you to be the whole reason why your life was extended for that little while. But death still remains: there is no armour against death. But One has come in who was able to meet him who had the might of death.

What is the might of death? Well, it means being cut off of course from all the things you have enjoyed in your life, people you have known. I sometimes think of that; you hear of people being killed on the road as they drive - how much mercy we all need in that - people went out in the morning, they left everything just as it was, saying, 'O I will do that when I come back' or 'I will straighten up tonight', or 'Later on I will do that', but they never come back, later on never comes and there are perhaps all kinds of disorder left behind by someone who was confident that he would be there that night. But "him who has the might of death" is allowed to use what instrumentality he has and persons are cut off. Yet there is One who had the power to meet it; not with his own kind of weapons either, He met him as the hymn says, 'Through weakness and defeat' (No 24).

Think of a giant being slain with a stone out of a brook! What a great thing it was on that day when David comes out confident in the living God, and he comes out in power. He takes a stone out of the shepherd's bag that he had and he slang it and he smote Goliath in the forehead and he collapsed to the ground, and then David went and cut off his head and took it in triumph to Jerusalem. Beloved, Christ has not slain death with a stone; when Christ came out of death every stone was rolled away, no stone remained. The Romans brought up, you might say, their biggest stone and sealed the grave with it, but He came out of death, the stone was just rolled away. There is no stone there now; He has been into death and

broken its power, and He has delivered those who through fear of death all their life were subject to bondage. Why the bondage? Because of the fear of death which is wrapped up with the reality of sin. The reason why people are afraid to die is not just that their affairs will be left in disorder and that their wives and husbands or children will sorrow over them, all that is true; but the fear of death is because the sting of death is sin.

But, beloved, Jesus in going into death has not only broken the power of death but has met the whole of the power of sin. How many things He did at once! I remember (and I certainly have said this before although perhaps not here) listening to a young man preaching and as he spoke about the cross he said, Think how much was accomplished compared to how little was said. Think of that! As you think of the cross how much was accomplished compared with how little was said. And just as David rose up and immediately, you might say in the type, they had wondered at the words of grace that came out of his mouth; he comes out in immense power. He will not use any armour, he comes out in the power of God and slays Goliath. In Luke's gospel eighteen chapters intervene between the words of grace coming out of His mouth and His going into death in order that He might destroy him who had the might of death, and yet He did it, and the interval is filled up with the music of the harp, God in grace coming out towards men and Jesus making known what God is in grace, chapter after chapter. There was no condition beyond its reach. Luke's platform is humanity, and there is grace extended towards humanity in a Man; and you can, as it were, hear the harp all the way through, a skilful player of the harp. Let us take chapter 15; the Pharisees begin to murmur saying "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (v 2) and He gets out the harp and plays three tunes on it and in the end God is justified; "it was right to make merry and rejoice". I suppose one of the instruments in the father's house that contributed to the music is the harp, just like David played. The words of grace go all through those intervening chapters in Luke's gospel, and in the end He did not just take a stone and smite the enemy, He went into death and broke its

power in its own place. One thing where the type of David does not reach to Christ is that David never actually died for anybody, nor could he; he could not actually die for anybody because if he had died that would have been the end of his life. But Christ has been into death and has been raised, and as I say, the stone has been rolled away, and just as He has come out of death, so the way through death is now opened up for every believer on Him. Christianity therefore presents a way of triumph and a way of liberty.

Now by His going into death and His rising again, presenting Himself as an object of faith to persons, He has established a kingdom. Now if I can sort out the parallels for you: in David's history you have the anointing, the words of grace, the slaying of the giant, in two chapters and then you have a very long time before the kingdom is established. Of course in a certain sense that is parallel to the establishment of Christ's kingdom; it is taking Him a long time, at least in me and perhaps in you, fully to establish His kingdom. But in the history of Jesus there was the anointing, and the words of grace, extended as I say over three years and then His death; but immediately He arose it was to establish His kingdom. Here in the scripture that we read David reigned over all Israel, he had established his kingdom. What a great thing that was for Judah and for Israel that David had established his kingdom! And he sets up an administration. I do not want to go into the history of all these men; a certain amount could be said about most of them. Joab is there and he is over the army; he was quite a good soldier, one of the sons of that very tough woman Zeruiah who was actually David's sister, but he had his place. The great thing when David established his kingdom was that Joab's propensities were kept under control. They needed to be and they were; in the freshness of David's kingdom the awkward propensities, the political propensities of Joab were kept under control, and he is presented here as a man of honour. You may think he did not altogether deserve it, but in David's kingdom in this chapter he is presented amongst honourable men. And then there is the chronicler and the priests and the scribe, and Benaiah, the man who could kill lions was there too over the executioners and

the runners, people who had to do with the maintenance of the kingdom. What Benaiah has to do is represented by the expression 'where the king's writ runs'. He represents the way in which the king's authority extends right out into the edges of the kingdom. But David had established a kingdom. And beloved, Christ has established a kingdom, He has established it in the Holy Spirit, and God gives the Holy Spirit to persons who believe in Him: Christ has established a kingdom in the hearts of men, a place where He rules, a place where His writ runs, where, just to interpret that expression, what He says goes. That is what Christ has established. I know expressions like 'the moral sway of God in the soul'; but it is God's dominion established in the souls of men in Christ that is established here. David established his kingdom. Everything that was needed for the maintenance of the kingdom was there; if it needed military power it was there, if it needed the records kept - I suppose in a certain sense Jehoshaphat must have been a kind of civil servant in a way, he was a chronicler and he kept things in proper order, and so on - that was needed, and the priests were needed, and Benaiah was needed, all the men that were needed were there, the whole system of things was there. And Christ has established a kingdom in which everything that is needed is there and it is for everybody's good. As has been said in ministry before, the kingdom is for man's benefit. And the man who was anointed and the man who played with the harp and the man who slew the giant established a kingdom; and the Man who was anointed, and the Man out of whose mouth words of grace came, and the Man who went into death and triumphed over it has established a kingdom and He intends that that kingdom should embrace you, He intends that His authority should reign in your soul. God intends to have that now in Christ.

Now chapter 9 is very familiar to us, it has often been preached from no doubt in this room. But I would just like you to have a view of chapter 9 like this: at the end of chapter 8 David's kingdom is established, and the Spirit says, I must now show you what the kingdom was like: I have shown you what the officers were now I will show you what the kingdom was like. So we will take just a sample

day of David's kingdom. What is the sample day, beloved? Is there anyone to whom I can show kindness? That is a sample day in Christ's kingdom. Joab would have had to spring to attention and say, It is not a day for turning out the troops, it is a day for showing kindness. The priests of course would enter into that very easily, and even Jehoshaphat would enter into that, I am sure that Jehoshaphat would look forward to writing up the record that day, a sample day in the kingdom when words of grace were not only coming out of his mouth but were actually going to be put into effect. He says, Is there any one? Let us take one of the extreme cases; that is what David says. We will not think of someone who was friendly with us and nearly came on to our side and we will just try and win him round, but let us take an extreme case, let us take someone whose father was opposed to us all the time, someone who fought against us, someone with whom the war was long, let us go out to the edges and bring someone in. Is there anyone left of the house of Saul? And nobody said, David, what do you mean, Saul fought with you most of his life, Saul never had any time for you? Do you not remember the time when he threw a javelin that nearly hit you and went into the wall, and you are looking for kindness? Oh, yes, says David, but you are going to have a sample day in my kingdom and you will see that it was not just *words* of grace, it was *activities* of grace. I am going to show you what my kingdom is like by manifesting the kindness of God.

Now I have not read the chapter because I do not want to go into all the detail - pretty well everybody here could tell me the detail of 2 Samuel 9 anyway - but they sent and fetched Mephibosheth.

They said, Yes, there is still Mephibosheth. So David had him sent for and fetched in. A pretty poor chap he must have looked, he was lame on both his feet; as we know his nurse was running away to protect him and she dropped him and ever afterwards he was lame on both his feet. He must have shuffled in to the king's presence.

And the king said, Mephibosheth, you are going to sit at my table after this. That is what you are going to do, you are going to sit at my table amongst the king's sons. And Mephibosheth does not

argue, he does not discuss it, he does not say, Oh, no, your majesty; you could not think of that. Mephibosheth in faith took it on. That is the great thing, he accepted what had been extended to him in grace straight away. Of course he found quickly that he had thirty six servants to look after him but Mephibosheth had a place amongst the king's sons. A sample day of the kingdom, beloved! And the next day would be just like this too, David would be reigning in grace and extending things to people in grace. The great character of the kingdom is grace and the kindness of God, and that the words of grace are not just words, but in grace, as was said many years before, that He takes up the beggar from the dunghill and makes him sit among princes (see 1 Sam 2: 8). You had to wait till you found Mephibosheth, until you found a beggar sitting amongst the princes, but eventually you found it because, as I say, the words of grace were not just words, it was the activity of grace.

I was just impressed the other day that 2 Samuel 9 must just have been a sample day of David's kingdom. There would be other days on which there would be trouble, and there would be Philistines to be fought, and it would be necessary to check up on the garrison that is down there among the Syrians, and to see that Hadadezer is not coming back over the Euphrates and things like that, all these things would have to be seen to; but if you wanted to test the kingdom you did not exactly go out with the troops, you came to the king's table and you found that this is what the kingdom is like. You sit down among the sons of God, that is really what it is like and you find that one of the other sons who is sitting next to you is actually the King's son and He is a chief ruler. You can sit next to Him; do you know that? David's sons were chief rulers, and as you sit at the table among the king's sons you find you are among the chief rulers; that is to say, you yourself can begin to act like the kingdom. You would not go away from David's table thinking that you are going to show people - 'I'll show them' or something like that - you would not go away even saying "Come... and see my zeal for Jehovah", 2 Kings 10: 16. The man who said that was in a very precarious situation and he got someone else into a precarious situation. You

go out in grace and you would remember where your seat was. I suppose if you went out and spent an ungracious day you would actually be late for the evening meal because you would have some tidying up to do. You see David's kingdom was a time of grace.

Beloved, Christ's kingdom is a great system of grace. I repeat again, Christ's kingdom is not just words. There are words of grace but there is activity of grace, grace demonstrated and people drawn into the blessings of grace, and Mephibosheth is there.

One thing it did was to make Mephibosheth the most loyal person in the kingdom. If David was away in sorrow and burdened and with conflict and in rejection, Mephibosheth would in spirit share it, and then when David comes back he says, Nothing matters to me but that my lord the king is come again to his own house in peace.

Do you know what this is? This is Luke 4: "I must needs announce the glad tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also" (v 43). Are you like that? Can you go out from the king's table to a city and tell them about the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, that it is established in Christ and it subsists in grace? What a thing to have any part in! You may think that the king's table would be too high for you, but, beloved, there are no other tables there. That is a distinctive thing about this kingdom, there is only the king's table, a very big table and there is no other. There is no table at the bottom of the room, there are no lone places within the door. If you come in you must sit at the king's table; there is no choice of seats, you have to go to the king's table and sit there and you enjoy it. And beloved, it makes people loyal to Christ, that they are the great recipients of His grace; they have been taken up from what they were and have been given a place where they rejoice in David's place, and they rejoice in the company they are in, and they know that what they are in is a blessed system of grace. You do not wonder when Jesus had said in Luke 4 "I must needs announce the glad tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also" that if you run with Luke to the end of his gospel and then through Acts you find the great apostle of the gentiles preaching the kingdom of God to everybody who would listen to him. That is what Paul was doing, anybody who

would listen heard about the kingdom of God, and I expect they went away saying, By grace we are saved.

Well, beloved, may the Lord give us some impressions of it. For His Name's sake.

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THE CHILDREN'S NATURE STUDY

We have a definite word from the Lord Jesus to observe with attention the lilies of the field and the birds of the heaven. In this way He illustrated His teaching that we should be dependent on our heavenly Father for everything. The flowers and even the many varieties of grass have their particular clothing without any effort of their own, while the birds are provided with food that they have no part in growing. In fact the ravens, which are so 'ravenous' that they are said sometimes even to eat their own young, once had enough food to spare so as to fly with two good meals a day for the prophet Elijah.

These facts and much else in the Bible prove the interest that the Creator takes in His own handiwork. You will remember, too, that He asked Job if it was he who guided the large group of seven bright stars called the Great Bear, or the Plough. This refers to the fact that this constellation, as it is called, makes a circuit round the Pole Star once in 24 hours. In Bible lands and in Europe the stars can be seen in some part of the sky at all seasons on any clear night.

In all these examples of nature study the purpose is to direct our thoughts beyond the created things to God Himself in the varied ways in which He has been made known. Even people who have never heard the glad tidings of Jesus and His love should believe in God as Creator because of the glory of His works. In ancient times no doubt children as well as men and women like Abraham and Sarah knew Him as the Almighty One yet ever ready to befriend them and enjoy their company. Later those to whom the perfect law came through Moses served God as revealed in the holy yet merciful name of Jehovah. It is of interest that this law applied to a large and sometimes strange variety of things in life. One of its provisions was the care of a bird's nest with fledglings and this followed immediately upon a command that a woman should not dress as a man nor a man as a woman.

Christians have the privilege of knowing God as Father, in fact the apostle John wrote especially to the little children "because ye have known the Father". Although we may not understand it much it is as a result of God's work in us that we have become believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a new and true nature so that as born again we are eager for the suited food of God's word and should grow up to Christ in all things. Are you a credit to the family?

J.C.Evershed