

A
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THE ATTITUDE OF FORGIVENESS

John 20: 20-24; Philemon 1-25

A.A.B. I thought we might speak together and seek the Lord's help as to the remission of sins, not exactly the view of eternal remission, but how the remission of sins operates among the saints. It is evident from the verses in John that it was the Lord's intention that remission should become an active part of our functioning. It marks the dispensation in a peculiar way, for we would be reminded of the Lord's words on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34); it is characteristic of the dispensation. I think we have habitually stressed the connection between repentance and forgiveness, which is a needful connection, forgiveness as we say based on repentance; that is not in any sense to be diminished in its importance. But I believe we would find, if we look carefully, that forgiveness is referred to many times apart from repentance. There is forgiveness with God that He may be feared.

Then in Philemon I think we have a beautiful picture of the operation of forgiveness. No doubt it is by way of exhortation, but the full standard of it is to be seen in this letter, the tone and spirit of which is unique. We are to try the spirits, John says, whether they are of God. It is a constant exercise in regard of living persons that we should do that and form a judgment accordingly, but it is a good thing too, so to speak, to try the spirits of those who have written the Scriptures, to try the spirit of Paul in this remarkable epistle and see the magnanimity of his attitude and how he would have it working out not only in the household to whom he wrote but in the local assembly.

S.D.K.R. Would what you have said, referring to the Lord's words when he was crucified, be seen in the end of Ephesians 4? It says, "be to one a compassionate, forgiving one another, so as – in Christ has forgiven you" (v.32).

A.A B. It does not speak of repentance, does it? I am not diminishing or weakening at all the place which repentance has; "if

he should repent, the Lord said, "forgive him", Luke 17: 3. But what was upon my spirit is that we should seek to get an impression, or rather seek to extend the importance which lies in the heart, I am sure, of the brethren as to this blessed matter. The passage you refer to gives us the divine standard of forgiveness – as God has forgiven you for Christ's sake. Now that is taken up in principle again and again in Paul's writings; in 2 Corinthians when he comes to speak of forgiveness, he says "if I have forgiven anything, it is for your sakes in the person of Christ", chap 2:10. What a thing that is! If only we could get into the current of that in our relations together. Another thing is that forgiveness is always absolute; would you say that?

S.D.K.R. We would like you to make that clearer.

A.A.B. Well, not long ago we heard of two per cent or three per cent repentance, but you could never speak of three per cent forgiveness: "her many sins are forgiven" (Luke 7: 47) – it is final, absolute clearance. That never comes up again: "their sins and their lawlessness's I will never remember a remember any more", Heb 10: 17.

R.T. Would the administration of forgiveness depend on repentance, but would it be our attitude all the time?

A.A.B. That is right, the attitude, that is what one has very much in mind. There is forgiveness with God that He may be feared, but the attitude is there.

R.T. Ministry some years ago referred to the net being mended; would that be what you are saying about forgiveness being absolute?

A.A.B. I think so. We all know how things tend to recur, and how there is a tendency with us in our frailty to carry things forward. The point of what is in mind, especially when we come to the epistle, is that the thing is cleared, and we go on. It is an administrative matter; we do not want to be frightened of that word, it is a right word, it is a scriptural word. Another equivalent is dispensation, and forgiveness is dispensed.

S.D.K.R. I have noticed that in Luke it says "if thy brother should sin, rebuke him; and if he should repent, forgive him", chap.17: 3. In Matthew it says "until seventy times seven", chap 18: 22. It does not actually mention 'repent' in that second Scripture. I wondered if that would apply if it is a personal matter.

A.A.B. I think so, the attitude is there, it is the starting point. We want to start rightly.

D.E.R. Is there a distinction between matters affecting the truth or the testimony, and personal trespass? With the first it may even need to go to the assembly but in all cases our attitude is to be one of forgiveness.

A.A.B. I do not think there is any exception to the attitude; it is always there, it is characteristic of the dispensation, and the standard is before us God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. He has done it for Christ's sake.

E.J.J. To refer again to Matthew 18, Peter says Lord "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?" but Jesus said to him "I say not to thee until seven times, but seventy times seven" v.22. Would that have a bearing on what you have in mind?

A.A.B. Yes, certainly it does, that is like Paul's account. We are to have resources in that sense. We are not to behave like bankrupts; the saints are wealthy. If we only knew what there is to be drawn upon in the Spirit! It is in the spirit in which things are done that such importance lies. "Receive the Holy Spirit", the Lord says.

G.W.B. We have all been impressed often with the apparent speed with which Peter took up the lead after the Lord had suffered; he must have found in the Lord the spirit of forgiveness.

A.A.B. That bears out what we are saying and of course connects our thoughts with the record in John 21 where there had been divergence by leaders; but the spirit of forgiveness in Christ – although we have not the word – is there. The Lord is not referring to the fruitless fishing expedition. Peter consequent upon that would,

I am sure, have the sense of the absoluteness of discharge from any liability, and he served in the Acts in the power of it.

G.W.E. I was thinking of that scripture as Mr Brown referred to it; it says "Repent, and be baptised", and then "for remission of sins", Acts 2: 38. It was so with Peter and now he is setting it out, and doing so for us too.

A.A.B. Yes, that is important, to keep the connection between repentance and forgiveness. We have that in the end of Luke's gospel in the commission, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached. I would not think for a moment of diminishing the importance of repentance, but it is the attitude of forgiveness, the spirit of the thing, if it could be strengthened amongst us. I am not saying it is not there, but if the flow of it could be increased.

R.T. The best robe, the ring and the sandals were there long before the younger son came back to enjoy them. They were there all the time in view of his wearing them. Would that not be our attitude towards the brethren that we miss, that we are holding something that really is theirs and are waiting on them coming into the joy of it?

A.A.B. Indeed! In our links together, we often have to do with one another as sinners, if you follow what I mean. All often offend, none of us is exempt from that, but the Spirit breathed into them – the spirit of the risen Man, the spirit of Christ – is how the matter is to be dealt with.

W.S. The detail of chapter 21 of John shows first how the Lord has resources which would warm and set at ease those whom He was going to serve, and then the skill with which He touches their affections. I was thinking of the wealth you were speaking of with the saints; in that chapter there are peculiar resources with the Lord which would have conveyed something to those persons who were served in that way.

A.A.B. It is beautiful to see the preparation that had gone on before the recovery, and it is that that we need to be in accord.

D.E.R. Matthew 18 ends very beautifully about forgiving from your hearts, not just in a formal way or begrudgingly but from your hearts.

A.A.B. Yes, and it is in that way that forgiveness is dispensed amongst us. We know what it has been to have an assembly meeting to forgive a brother; as may be necessary, but I am not thinking of that side but of the spirit of the thing in our relations with one another. There is no formality in love, and forgiveness is a function of love. "Love amongst yourselves" (John 13: 35) involves the spirit of forgiveness all the time.

G.W.E. In John 20 we have teaching regarding remission coming first.

A.A.B. Yes; does that not support what has been said as to our attitude? There is perfect balance in regard of divine teaching in these matters: in Matthew it is binding and loosening, in John it is remission and retaining. The character of John's ministry is directed towards moral and spiritual state amongst us.

J.H. Luke 15 has been referred to; the father there tells the bondmen to "Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet" (v.22); he did not do it himself. Would you say something about how that works out?

A.A.B. I think the bondmen show the element of what is sympathetic with the father in the intelligence and knowledge and appreciation of his attitude to the son received; it is a question there of reception.

How do we receive one another? We are to "receive... one another, according as the Christ also has received you to the glory of God", Rom 15 7.

W.T.A. How would you say that forgiveness is ministered, as we get in Colossians; "if any have a complaint against any; even as the Christ has forgiven you, so also do ye", chap 3: 13?

A.A.B. It is all part of this great matter and how it is to be worked out amongst us, not held as doctrine merely but the thing expressed.

Colossians and the epistle to Philemon are coincident; the two writings went into the locality at the same time. I suppose Onesimus

took his letter of commendation, and Epaphras carried the letter of Paul to the Colossians. So you can see what was in the mind of the Spirit in Paul at this juncture in his ministry; the doctrinal side is in Colossians but the spirit of it is in Philemon. Paul exudes the spirit of forgiveness.

R.T. Is there something distinct in your mind as to the connection between the inbreathing and the remitting of sins?

A.A.B. Well, it requires that the spirit in which remitting is done should accord with the inbreathing. Breathing out threatenings and slaughter (see Acts 9: 1) was another thing, but we partake of another spirit. Those disciples, John and James, would have brought down fire from heaven upon people who would not receive the Lord, but the Lord just says "Ye know not of what spirit ye are", Luke 9: 55. That, I understand, was not to imply that they were of any wicked spirit but they belonged to another order, the kind of spirit that would later mark the saints as having been breathed into.

R.T. It is in view of producing character, is it not? The breathing into them is that they may have the character of this Man who is ascending.

A.A.B. That is so important. We all tend to be formal; most of us belong to a nation which makes a great deal of formality, but we need to be more immersed in the informality which is involved in the spirit of forgiveness.

G.W.B. Have you anything to say as to the depth of repentance required?

A.A.B. I think that is a matter that has to be taken up by each one of us on our own side; depth of repentance rightly increases, does it not? Is that our experience as you have grown up in the school of God? In what you have come through in your history with God would you say that in measure there is some increase in repentance?

G.W.B. Yes certainly.

A.A.B. It should always be so with us. If one speaks for oneself, it has been too slow. But "Who can count the dust of Jacob..." (Num 23: 10); I think there is some allusion to repentance there. "I... repent in dust and ashes", Job 42: 6. Another feature of the epistle to Philemon which I had not noticed until fairly recently is that, whilst it has a distinctly private and personal character, it is also addressed to the assembly; "the assembly which is in thine house", which I think is to convey to us that the truth we are speaking about is to work out in a practical sense in the local assembly.

S.H. It must be so. In 2 Corinthians grief works repentance (see chap 7: 10). That was in each one of them, was it not?

A.A.B. Well, it was evidently in the body of the saints, and grief works repentance, not the grief of the world but grief according to God. We have recourse to the cross in our relations with God, and to what was enacted in the sufferings of Christ, culminating in the forsaking; these are things which promote and deepen repentance.

S.H. So it was Christ crucified that the apostle brought before them in the first epistle.

A.A.B. Exactly, because that was to meet the public side of things.

R.T. Was Paul really appealing to the work of God in Philemon? That is something that would help us in this forgiving attitude, if we were conscious of the work of God in one and another.

A.A.B. And that outweighs every disadvantage. The circumstances were very acute; this bondman Onesimus had misbehaved, he had apparently sinned against his master, probably purloined his goods and run away. There was everything to aggravate the feelings of Philemon but, as you say, Paul appeals to God's work in him in this beautiful spirit. He addresses him as brother and then speaks of himself as a partner with him; that is the family of God and the fellowship. Then he refers three times to the bowels of the saints and to his bowels. He refers to the delinquent slave as "my bowels". All this comes into the spirit of forgiveness.

E.J.J. The chief of sinners is writing this epistle. He had a great depth in his soul as to what he had been forgiven, so he can write in this way and appeal to the work of God in this man, can he not?

A.A.B. I think so. There is great personality, spiritual personality, seen here, primarily in Paul but also in Philemon.

J.M.W. Do you think that relationships amongst brethren would be improved greatly by this proceeding normally? It is not just that you forgive someone and are forgiven by someone and that is that, but that should provide a quality of relationship between the persons that was not there before.

A.A.B. I think Paul's reference to his bowels, and the bowels of the saints, is a reference to what is organic; I think the brethren understand that word. There are self-acting organs in the body. It is the self-acting side that needs to be strengthened amongst us.

M.C.E. Philemon would hear the epistle to the Colossians, would he not? In it, it says "with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you", chap 4: 9. That would touch him, would it not?

A.A.B. Yes, "one of you". He was not that when he went away, it seems. Paul had begotten him in his bonds. We do not know the details, but God was over all that and Onesimus had become serviceable to Paul in prison and he longed to keep him that he might minister to him in the bonds of the glad tidings, but then he recognizes what is due to his master. We have not the word 'righteousness' in this epistle, but we have the thing.

R.T. Do you think that the attitude of forgiveness being in display would promote repentance rather than having to work it the other way around?

A.A.B. Yes, and it is the promotional side that can only be provided in this way. We may search the text books, the ministry, for what to do in certain circumstances, but, brethren, if the truth were known better by us, we would not need to do that, we would know what to do and do it; and so we would proceed on together and there would be great gain. The trespass offering is interwoven in the epistle to

Philemon. It is not just a receipt – a bill rendered, and a receipt given – but the fifth part is added, and the position is stronger than it was before.

J.S. Do you think that Joseph and his constant burning towards his brethren would exemplify something of this? He was much more in the gain of forgiveness than they were really.

A.A.B. A good example; his bowels burned for his brother Benjamin. That is what needs to be more active with us, the burning. "Was not our heart burning in us...?", Luke 24: 32. We are so slow to react to grace, if I may speak for myself (perhaps I should only do that), but it promotes repentance.

R.H.B. The apostle had had to do with Onesimus, as well as in this letter to Philemon, because he speaks of having begotten him in his bonds. The fact that he wrote a letter about it shows how important this matter is, that relationships should be established and that nothing should be allowed to break in upon them.

A.A.B. That is very important; and he does not write the letter as an apostle; he was an apostle and could have required, as having divinely-given authority, that this should be done, but he does not; he says "I entreat". We want more entreaty. How a man of such authority as Paul rightly had delegated to him, can relinquish for a moment that side and appeal! "I beseech you brethren", he says; that was a large part of his ministry.

G.W.B. The something more is profit, is it not?

A.A.B. Profit, yes; I think that is the allusion to the fifth part being added, that we do not just go through an exercise and, to use a simple illustration, change two sixpences for a shilling; there is profit. The meaning of Onesimus's name is profit.

H.M. So was he more profitable as a brother than as a bondman? I take it this would result in his bondmanship ceasing and he would be in the locality as one who contributed to everything.

A.A.B. He would be in the assembly not as a bondman but as a beloved brother; possibly he would fulfil his duties as a bondman as

he had never done before; there is what is altogether above that level. The literal side is slavery, a principle of long history in the human race, but never to be allowed into the assembly, that the saints should be held in bondage.

G.W.E. How do you regard verse 15 then: "that thou mightest possess him fully for ever".?

A.A.B. That is very interesting and shows the nature of the bonds by which we are bound to one another. Take the choicest relationship in nature, husband and wife, it is not forever, it is part of the provisional side but what we touch in the assembly as brethren and as of the body of Christ and as of the family of God is for ever, it will never cease.

G.W.E. There is such quality here, is there not? And this is what the apostle would desire for this slave, but then we need to know something of this quality working out.

A.A.B. That is right; the highest truth is to be brought to bear practically upon the details of life.

D.E.R. Is this right attitude of mind among the saints prompted by remembering that they are persons who have been anointed, that however much any of us might slip from that high level, the saints are still persons worthy of respect. We see that very much in David's attitude towards Saul.

A.A.B. Yes, respect for the anointing is a very important thing to keep in mind. It may involve that we regard a person, a brother or a sister, abstractly. What springs so quickly into our minds is that where there is a defect we become wholly occupied with the defect.

We need to look at God's work more, see its beauty, see how it can be wrought upon. So he says "receive him". How do we receive one another? Do we say, "If you like you can come, but would you mind coming to the back door and not the front door".

R.T. He says "receive him as me".

A.A.B. There again you have a certain standard. If Paul came to Barnet you would see to it that he was rightly received, would you

not? but if a lesser person came, supposing one who had a history like Onesimus, could we receive him as we would receive Paul? "Receive him as me"; "receive him, that is, my bowels".

F.P.A.S. Were we all in the gain of the word, "I forgave thee all that debt" (Matt 18: 32), we could not hold anything against another, could we? It would promote the atmosphere that Mr Taylor was referring to earlier.

A.A B. Yes, I think we have the example of Paul to help us on that line. He takes the place of being the first of sinners and of having received mercy and that the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love; he conveys in those words that Jesus made no demands on him. What a conversion that was and he never dropped below the level of it!

W.T.A. These individual circumstances we may be helped in, but when it comes to seventy times seven, what are we going to do about that?

A.A B. Be sure that your account is healthy. Paul had an account; he says no matter how much it is, you put it on my account; seventy times seven. What is the state of my account? Of course, with highly honoured persons there is very little difficulty; the test comes when you are dealing with a sinner. How do we deal with one another as sinners? How has God dealt with us as sinners? It should not be any different.

F.P.A.S. In that address by Mr Taylor on 'The conversion of a Sinner' (see Vol 13 p410) he says that converters were very few.

A.A B. We would have to admit that.

F.P.A.S. Love covers a multitude of sins.

A.A.B. This is a range of things that one feels is of such great importance because it does not lie in the sphere of appearance, it is not on the surface. This meeting today and what is to follow, if the Lord will, involves ministry, and we can all see and hear what is going on, but what is going on underneath?

J.M.W. I do not want to divert, but could you say a word to distinguish for us the matter of plenary forgiveness from what you are speaking about in the meeting generally.

A.A.B. Plenary forgiveness; tell us what that word means.

J.M.W. I understand that plenary forgiveness is in God's prerogative alone; "there is forgiveness with thee", Ps 130: 4. The saints have not the prerogative to forgive in a plenary way, but the administration of that forgiveness is largely committed to the saints, is it not?

A.A.B. Now you have answered your own question better than I could have done; it is the distinction between what is initial and what is final and eternal in its character – plenary forgiveness and administrative forgiveness. We might say, we do not need this just at the moment, we are going on very happily in our locality and we are not conscious that there is anything outstanding. But you may need it, you may need it very quickly and very suddenly, and is the attitude there?

J.M.W. I wondered whether that might bear on the remark made in the early part of the reading as to matters of the truth or what is public; the question would be in the minds of the saints as to whether we understand that God has forgiven that. If God has acted in His own prerogative we cannot but submit to that and happily flow into what you are saying.

A.A.B. What you are saying is helpful because we all have a certain range of knowledge of the truth and we know what is right in that sense, but there is another range of things in which we are to be imitators of God as dear children; do we know that sphere of things as well? That is the test, whether any one of us at any time is able to express the attitude of God toward another.

D.E.R. Is the way Paul is moving here calculated to settle matters, not that they are smoothed over and rumblings proceed below the surface thereafter, but rather that matters should be finalised and settled for good?

A.A.B. Yes; the true effect of forgiveness is that the thing is not remembered any more, it is eliminated and we go on in relation to the great thoughts of God in the truth, the purposes of God. Luke 15 sets all that out for us so beautifully in the setting of the gospel.

G.C.B. Is what happened to Benjamin at the end of Judges a warning to us? It was, you might say, the loss of a locality. The brethren came to it that they had gone too far.

A.A.B. Yes, and if you read those chapters you find how repentance worked out, as it did also in the brethren of Joseph. Repentance had to be worked out in them; at one point they said "We are indeed guilty concerning our brother, whose anguish of soul we saw", Gen 42: 21. What a point that is to come to, if you are in that position!

J.S. Onesimus became a brother to Paul both in the flesh and in the Lord. Does the working out of this whole bearing of forgiveness toward one another very often involve something practical?

A.A.B. There is nothing more practical than love, and it is very remarkable that Paul uses this language; "a beloved brother, specially to me, how much rather to thee, both in the flesh" – that is in the condition in which we all are at this time – "and in the Lord".

G.W.E. Mr Coates said that he might have looked after the horses (see Outline of Hebrews etc., p.338). He was useful to him in the flesh; that was his ordinary occupation.

A.A.B. Yes. The reference to 'in Lord' is a reference to the Lord's rights; He has rights in all these matters and in regard of each one of us.

R.H.B. Lower down Paul says that he was coming as well; not only was Philemon to receive Onesimus but he was to receive Paul: "prepare me also a lodging". The note says 'prepare hospitality for me'; that is, 'to receive me as a guest'.

A.A.B. Yes, what do you make of that?

R.H.B. He seems to make a good deal in the epistle of this matter of reception that you are speaking about. I was thinking of his own reception in Damascus where he was received as a brother. With all

his past he was received there as a brother, and it seems to be what is brotherly that he is emphasising.

A.A.B. Which is connected with the truth of the family of God, so that even if one sins against you, you must never forget that he is your brother, according to Matthew: "if thy brother sin against thee", chap. 18:15. But I think it is very beautiful, as you point out, to see how Paul is quite confident that there will be no difficulty about his being received: "prepare me also a lodging"; no one would surely question his coming. He says earlier, "receive him" and "receive him as me". I just thought that the spirit of these things might help us to get into the presence of God about it, to seek the help that He will give us, and there will be a great result in the sense of profit.

BARNET

27 January 1979

Key to initials

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GOING FORTH

A.A.Bellamy

Jeremiah 38: 14-23; 15: 1-4; Ezekiel 14: 12-14; 19-21

In the course of the Lord's ministry amongst His own He outlined certain conditions that would come upon Jerusalem, and it called forth enquiry on their part as to when these things should be, what would be the sign of His coming and of the completion of the age.

We know that those passages, particularly in the gospel of Matthew, have a distinctly dispensational meaning and yet they are there for our instruction, and the moral application of them is always beneficial; that is to say, we might intelligently raise that enquiry as to when these things were coming. Men in the world would like to know what is coming. The saints are not ignorant, they have been made acquainted with what is coming, so when it comes they are not surprised. In the course of His teaching at that time the Lord Jesus referred not only to external matters such as wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes and famines – things that could be taken account of by anyone – but also to something that only the initiated could take account of – the parable of the fig tree, when its branch becomes tender, which would be a sign. That relates in the application of it to conditions among those who are faithful to Him, involving the substantial work of the Spirit in anticipation of and preparation for this great moment to which we are looking, when He will actually appear in glory.

I would like to share with all the brethren here an exercise which I have carried for some time, and it is this, that we are prone to evaluate the current conditions by virtue of what is public, conditions in the world, and draw the conclusion that the coming of the Lord is imminent, which is perfectly true. But how far do we set out the condition which the Lord speaks of in the parable of the fig tree – the tenderness, the evidence of spiritual life, the susceptibility to His word, devotedness to Himself, the appreciation surely of what has gone before in the faithful service of others and the holy

determination not to give one inch of ground? How far do those things mark us? That is my exercise and that is why I have read these passages, from the prophets, which may not be so well known amongst us as they should be, particularly from Jeremiah, of all the prophets a great suffering prophet. He had word from God to the people from time to time and he suffered on that account; he was not accepted, certainly not popular, but he communicated God's word to the people and on that account he suffered. We do well to look into what he says.

I read these sections beginning with the passage in chapter 38 where the king, that is the responsible element in Jerusalem, seeks the prophetic word. I do not know that we can say much in regard of Zedekiah; he was a vacillating character, a weak kind of man who went in the direction in which those around him went. He came under influences which were not good, but then he also came under influence that was good, and when Jeremiah communicated God's word to him he was under good influence and yet he did not heed the word. The word was that they should go forth from Jerusalem.

We are accustomed to the idea of going forth, according to Hebrews: "therefore let us go forth to him", chap 13: 13. Notice those words "to him". It is not simply to occupy another position publicly, or to set up anything novel, but the point is that we go forth unto Him. He is outside; our blessed Saviour suffered as the sin-offering outside the gate, and if persons go forth and miss the thought of going forth to Him they become just a sect, something which is set up which has no divine authority. The key at the present time is unto Him, He being outside and under reproach. The youngest believer knows that; the child at school as confessing the name of Jesus as Lord finds that that name is under reproach. As in Matthew 11, after the Lord's patient ministry to those cities Bethsaida and Capernaum – wonderfully favoured cities in which He had ministered the truth of God, in which He Himself had laboured and they had rejected God's word – He was outside but He was saying something. At the end of that chapter we have the words of Jesus, "Come to me" (v.28), the rejected Saviour, our Master. Writers of the

epistles refer to the Lord Jesus in that way; some, Peter says, "deny the master that bought them", 2 Pet 2: 1. Well, we would no longer be at home in what hated Him.

Now there is another aspect to which I wish to draw your attention in this matter of going forth, not going forth to Him outside the camp exactly, but another aspect of going forth. You will see that it comes into this section I have read in Jeremiah 38: "Thus saith Jehovah the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If thou wilt freely go forth to the king of Babylon's princes". We need to understand the bearing of that going forth. Those in Jerusalem at that time were maintaining things; they might have said, we are here in Jerusalem, do you not understand the tradition that lies behind the position that we occupy, how far back it goes? and we are keeping things going; the king of Babylon and his forces may be all around but we are just going on with what is traditional up here in Jerusalem. That is a very great danger, beloved brethren, even in our history as brethren, because there has been more than a hundred years of that kind of history. We may easily fall into the idea that we are the natural successors of those who have gone before, and what are we then but a mere sect? The word is to go into captivity. You say, to go into Babylon? I do not say to go into the world but to go into captivity.

That is something to think about, to accept the government of God.

How powerfully it is operating in the world among the nations, operating in Christendom in the church so called, but the thing is to accept that the position is one of captivity. Have we contributed to it responsibly? We have, and we have to own that. When we come to the other scripture the reason for what has taken place is given, and the reason lay in what Manasseh had done. That may have a voice to us. Accepting the captivity is not just lying down under circumstances but involves a certain intelligent understanding of God's ways. Paul went into captivity, and out of the captivity into which he went came the very best. The Ephesian epistle, the Colossian epistle, and the epistle that we read this morning, came out of the captive conditions that he had accepted. He had not accepted them with any heart-burning, he did not repine in captivity.

"I, the prisoner in the Lord", Eph 4: 1. O, what a principle it is to see that captivity is to be accepted under the ways of God! Blessing will follow. That is the word of Jeremiah to the king but he would not listen. So you find in these chapters that the prophetic ministry goes on, the word comes constantly and people do not listen to it. They become complacent in their conditions and are held in certain fetters of religious pride and that kind of thing. They had to do with Jeremiah; the hierarchy in Jerusalem and the proud men that were there caused the suffering that came upon the prophet, not to speak of those who prophesied falsely. These things are extant in the profession. I once heard it explained in great detail that we were no longer in the great house but that somehow we had got out of it into a nice little secluded position, and what went on all around had nothing whatever to do with us. Our position, I need not say, is secluded, very secluded, but in the responsible setting we cannot get out of the great house, and therefore there is the need to go forth, and not to refuse to go forth; that is, to accept the ruin that has come in upon the whole profession of Christianity and accept our part in contributing to it.

Now I read from chapter 15 where evidently the conditions in which these prophets served were very bad. I do not want to dilate upon the badness of public conditions but we should feel things more deeply, if I may say so, than we do. We should not merely sit in judgment, although judgment and discernment is called for, but we need to feel things. There was a father in the gospels who felt things; he felt things because his little daughter was at extremity; and that is the position in Jeremiah 15, it is an extreme position. Do we realize that we are in extreme conditions as this dispensation is about to close? The apostate drift is more and more apparent, the drift away from God; we should feel it. "My little daughter is at extremity", Mark 5: 23. If you look at public conditions in a practical way in so far as we are aware of them (I am not referring to what is political) there is the situation where in five localities in this country only one brother, that is, the executive side, the side responsible for maintaining the testimony and the service of God, is reduced to one

prepared to walk in the truth. That is extremity, dear brethren, and we need to feel it and be with God about it and perhaps weep a little more about it, because Jeremiah is a weeper, Timothy too and others. Those tears were not wasted, they are the kind of tears that God puts into His bottle. Nevertheless, in these extreme conditions God is speaking: "And Jehovah said unto me". Jeremiah is saying what God said to him. It is not exactly a communication to be delivered to the people, it is a prophet, a man that God is saying something to, and of course he will have something to say to the people. "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, my soul would not turn toward this people". What a situation!

Now one great feature of this dispensation is intercession. We referred to that in connection with the Lord upon the cross: "Father", He says, "forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34. Was that prayer heard? Surely. He came to die, He came to change the dispensation from law to grace. O, thank God that He came! Do we thank Him for coming? Think of the mission of Jesus to change the dispensation from law to grace. He interceded upon the cross. He intercedes also in John 17 but not for forgiveness; He is demanding certain things of the Father, not praying for the world – "I do not demand concerning the world" (v.9). The world has fixed its doom in the rejection of the Son of God, but He prays for us. Well, God speaks of these two great servants that He had had, Moses and Samuel; Moses first, a man who stood in the breach and diverted God's consuming anger from the people, typical of Christ. O what feelings are bound up with that! They are reflected and brought into the present dispensation, for we see the same in Paul, how he intercedes for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh (see Rom 9: 3), and as the note says, he was beside himself. I just raise the question; how much do we feel these things? Do we feel them like Moses in any measure? There the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

And Samuel, at one of the darkest points in Israel's history, says, God forbid that I should sin in not praying for you (see 1 Sam 12: 23). Well, God speaks to this prophet about a condition of things

where intercession is unavailing. John says "There is a sin unto death: I do not say of that that he should make a request", 1 John 5: 16. There is a mysterious allusion in that passage. You say, what does it mean? Well, what does it mean to you? We are in solemn times; the moral issue is a solemn issue; and so God draws attention to this condition that it might affect us, and there again we have the thought of going forth. The people say "Whither shall we go forth?" What are we to do? There is the sword and there is death, there is famine and finally there is captivity. Salvation lies in accepting captivity, in not rebelling against the ways of God but humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God and in due season, as Peter says, He will exalt you.

Now where I read in Ezekiel, Daniel is referred to with two others – "Noah, Daniel, and Job". God selects certain servants to speak about them, three of them. They had ministered and one of them was still ministering – for Daniel was contemporary with Ezekiel – and the word was that if these men were in a land that had departed from God it would be unavailing. "When a land sinneth against me by working unfaithfulness"; a land, any land, I suppose ; we think of this land in which most of us were born , what favour God has shown to it, how He has preserved it, even in our histories God has preserved this land from invasion; but "when a land sinneth against me by working unfaithfulness... though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job should be in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness". It is not a question of them going into captivity here; it is the principle of deliverance by their own righteousness, that if these men were in the land they would save only themselves. History shows that they all had saved others.

Noah was instrumental in the salvation of others; he preached righteousness; he was a man who would be firm as to the rights of God in mercy; he saved his house; he was a righteous man. Daniel was a holy man; the first impression you get of him is as a youth amongst his companions, and what is current in that company of persons, Daniel and his companions, is holiness. What a word that is to all of us! I was going to say to those who are young, but

however old we are or however young, a constant exercise is as to holiness. That was Daniel's exercise; he went on a long time serving on that principle of holiness; he saw empires fall, and we have seen one fall, in the lifetime of persons in this company an empire has fallen. You might say that conditions go on, we are thankful to God for mercy and are we not committed to God? Dear brethren, at what level may I ask are we committed? Jacob's committal was at Bethel; he vowed a vow there; he said "If God will be with me, and keep me on this road that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and a garment to put on... then shall Jehovah be my God", Gen 28: 20,21. And not only so, but Jacob says, I will give Thee a tenth. That was committal, but that is not Christianity; Christianity is Romans 12: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service" (v.1). That is full committal, nothing held back. Dear young people, confess the Lord's name, that is initial; the next step in committal is to take the Lord's supper and identify yourself with Him in His death, and accede to the desire of His love: "this do in remembrance of me", 1 Cor 11: 24. Now reverting in closing to the passage in Ezekiel, God speaks of these three men; He likes to speak of them. There is a chapter in Daniel where you have the names of three men again and again: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. God likes to speak of them. Then we might speak of three men, three distinguished servants and their ministry, and say, we have their ministry and have read it, and we thank God for it. But God says of these three men in Ezekiel that if they were in the land which was sinning they would save only themselves. It is not merely by acceding to what is right in ministry that we shall be saved; the principle of salvation is to *do what is right*, and that is individual, as in 2 Timothy 2: "every one who names the name of the Lord" (v.19). That is not to say that such will not be used to the blessing of others or the deliverance of others, but God is bringing home here the current conditions in a picture of what Christendom has become, and the great importance of what is individual in our exercises day by day. Those of us who have read Mr Raven's ministry a little know that he stressed what was individual, and

certain persons today, believers, take that as indicating that what is collective is finished. That is not true. We must be fair to those men who have gone before us, and if we quote part let us quote all; we shall find that in that same ministry there is equal emphasis put upon the company.

Well, I think I have said enough to raise exercise as to what is current, and fully to accept the need of going into captivity, because it is a question of obedience and of resisting the tendency, the ever-present tendency, to continue on just as things have been, and to seek to maintain in an outward way the appearance of what is right without the vitality that really attaches to it. May the Lord help us by deepening our exercises and to find the answer to every one of those exercises in Himself, in His own presence, in His present love, His love for every one of us and His love for the assembly. For His Name's sake.

BARNET

27 January 1979

"DO THOU LIKEWISE"

R.H.Brown

Luke 10: 25-37

This is a great episode of grace in the gospel of grace. We might say it is grace at its basic level. It is not to be despised for that. I think that it is a poor day for us spiritually if we ever begin to despise the grace that met us, met us in such great need. But it is divine grace exemplified in the person of this Samaritan. It has often been preached from. I wonder how many preachings we have heard from this episode of grace. It has been used powerfully in the preaching to bring home to us the way that Jesus Himself has moved in love for our souls. It is a very vivid picture of the way in which Jesus has loved us so much and come after our souls, but then I think the point of the parable is lost if we leave it at that. If we see it only as a picture of divine grace towards us, I believe we miss the whole point of the parable which comes in the last word to this man who was seeking to justify himself; the Lord says to him "Go and do thou likewise".

As we have been under the sound of this ministry as to grace, the Lord's own directive would come home to us individually; "Go and do thou likewise". If in any sense you have tasted of divine grace and been the object of it, the directive from the One who has so exhibited it Himself is "Go and do thou likewise". How affecting it is, as we measure ourselves alongside the One who has done so much! What is our measure in grace compared to His? The Samaritan came journeying with resource to meet the need that was there. Others passed by and saw a need and left it. How much need there is in us individually! and there are needs known to us in our localities. We may know them, we may be expert at diagnosing the need, but have we, as this Samaritan had, the resource to meet the need and the condition that was there? He was journeying, and what he ministered to the one that was in such a state was what he had with him, what he was journeying with. You might say that he

ministered what he was enjoying himself to one that had been robbed of so much – robbed of his communion, robbed of the joy of his salvation, robbed of all the joy of the testimony and the privileges that belong to it. He had been robbed of all that, but not only robbed, he had wounds inflicted upon him. You think of the state of this poor man, and yet there was resource to meet his condition.

But then he is brought to the inn. Our brother has raised with us the question as to what qualities we look for in our local companies. I found that a very appealing question, as I thought about it. What are the qualities that Jesus looks for in His assembly? What are they? I believe that one of them is that there should be care of the personnel, care of the personnel of the assembly. How grievously that has been overlooked in recent times. You might say that love of the truth is greater than love of the brethren and that would be right, but I believe there is very little difference. I believe that love of the brethren is important. John would tell us it is most important and he would tell us that we know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren, I look for that feature in the local company, care of the personnel, and as I take account of the Lord's directive in this chapter, I am compelled to contribute to it. It is my part to care for the local company, to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace so that the enemy should not ravage again, as he has so frequently in the past. How important it is! I believe the Lord looks for that. As we sit under the sound of the ministry we would sense the Lord's own appeal in it, that there should be conditions of grace and conditions of care in our local assemblies, so that the enemy may not ravage among the flock.

This poor man was brought along, supported, unable to walk himself. He was brought to the inn – you notice that – and it says first of all that the Samaritan took care of him. He "brought him to the inn", it says, "and took care of him". Wonderful thing that! As we think of what the assembly is as a sphere of salvation, a sphere where we can be under the personal touch and administration of Jesus. But then the Samaritan left, and did he leave that man to his

own devices? Did he leave him to get on as best as he could? He entrusted him to the innkeeper. That has often been used in the gospel preaching as a type of the Holy Spirit and how right that is; but then I see in the Lord's directive that He would have me to be an innkeeper, and to care for the assembly in this way that it is presented as an inn. He would have each one of us, dear brethren, to be innkeepers in this sense. He entrusted to this man, the innkeeper, this poor soul, and he said, "Take care of him". What a directive, dear brethren, to us individually, to take care of our local brethren! Yes, and to take care of any whom the Lord in His infinite grace might bring amongst us. We might know little of their condition of soul; we may discover it to be similar to the condition of soul of this man in Luke 10 who was so devastated. We might find persons fleeing from a system of bondage and darkness and idolatry, who have been robbed, robbed of the truth, starved of it. And we may find as they come amongst us that there have been grievous wounds inflicted, and the Lord's directive to us would be to take care of such, not only raise moral issues with them; that was not the directive that was left with the innkeeper. There might have been moral issues to raise with him eventually, as to why it was that he was drifting on that downward road from Jerusalem to Jericho, but the first thing laid upon that innkeeper was that he was to be taken care of.

I would covet a greater love for souls. The king of Sodom valued them; he said "Give me the souls, and take the property for thyself", Gen 14 :21. The enemy knows the value of souls. Do I? Do I appreciate the value to God of souls? So the directive is "Take care of him". He does not leave the innkeeper without resource; he gives him what is sufficient; you might say he gives him what is sufficient until the rapture. He says, here are two denarii, "and whatsoever thou shalt expend more, I will render to thee on my coming back". I believe that His coming again is very near, imminent, the return of this Samaritan. And when the Lord comes back He will see how we have been getting on, how we have been taking care of one and another in the meantime. But He has left sufficient in these two denarii. How affecting to think of them! He

took out two denarii; but then he says "whatsoever thou shalt expend more". What an appeal that is! You might say there was sufficient, but then there was just a hint, as he left, that there might be the opportunity to expend more. I believe there is ample opportunity, beloved brethren, in our local assemblies to expend ourselves more. He says "whatsoever thou shalt expend more, I will render to thee".

He was not going to be put in his debt. At the end of Revelation the Lord says "I come quickly, and my reward with me, to render to every one as his work shall be", chap 22: 12. So He is coming again, and if we have expended ourselves more in the care of His saints it will surely not pass unnoticed. He will come and His reward with Him, to render to each one as his work shall be. But in the meantime, in the time when the enemy is seeking by every available opportunity to make inroads among the flock, He would raise with us, I believe, the question that has already been raised, as to what it is that we look for in our local meetings, so that we can contribute to it ourselves.

And He would raise with us two questions: one would be "take care of him", and the other what He said to this man who sought to "justify himself". What a poverty-stricken line that is to be on! How innate it is in each one of us to justify ourselves! And yet the apostle says "love...does not seek what is its own", 1 Cor 13: 5. It is not that it does not seek what is not its own, but it does not even seek what is its own. He leaves with such a one, this lawyer, the challenge: "Go and do thou likewise". I believe it would be laid by the Lord upon us, dear brethren, as we have in our measure tasted of His grace to us individually, such grace against such need, that we should ourselves be displaying it, be exponents of it, in the places where we are, until He come, for His Name's sake.

BUCKHURST HILL

27 December 1974

THE CHILDREN'S SAFETY

The safety of the soul of every man, woman and child is of vital importance in the sight of our Saviour God. Hence, He causes the gospel to be preached urgently far and wide. Peter in his preaching spoke of the name of Jesus as a name by which we must be saved.

In some respects the glad tidings may be likened to a lifeboat.

Many such have set out in stormy weather to the aid of ships wrecked on the Goodwin Sands or some dangerous or rocky coast.

The lifeboatmen would not just announce to the stricken sailors that they had brought a very nice lifeboat and invite them to consider it.

They would urge them to jump in as quickly as possible! Once inside the lifeboat the saved mariners would find how wonderfully their every need had been provided for. So the gospel is not just a means of escape from danger, but is the "glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God".

In the blessing of Benjamin by Moses it is said "The beloved of the Lord, shall dwell in safety by him". An unbeliever once asked how this could be reconciled with Jacob's blessing which says "Benjamin – as a wolf will he tear to pieces... the prey". The quick answer was that Saul of Tarsus of that very tribe of Benjamin had, when unconverted, ravaged the Lord's people. After his conversion, however, they were able to dwell in safety by him. We too may be preserved in the testimony of our Lord and the enjoyment of life eternal by keeping close to the ministry of Paul.

To confess the name of the Lord Jesus is a means of protection to believers, be it at school, at business or in the course of ordinary home life. The wisest of men said that the name of the Lord is "a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe". How different this tower is from the first one mentioned in the Bible which only led to the severe judgment of God and the confusion of tongues. Even so the Bible in every language has, I believe, the word "Abba", meaning "Father". Do you know God as Father?

J.C.Evershed