

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

A.Martin

Acts 8: 26-40

Philip was a wonderful vessel whom the Lord had used in Samaria.

He had been preaching in Samaria and there had been great results from his work. Philip was not an apostle, he was a man who was selected as being filled with the Holy Spirit and of good report, but he was one who did things and he did what came to his hand to do.

That was how he first came to the attention of the apostles.

Something needed to be done, and Philip was one of those chosen to do it. But he had this message to leave his work and go to the desert. Philip was an unquestioning servant of the Lord. He did not argue about that, he went to the desert and he came across a man, a man who had felt his need to come and worship at Jerusalem.

This man was a great man, he came from Ethiopia and he had a lot of resources. Indeed the whole of the treasury of Ethiopia was under his hand, and yet he had a need. He could not remain in Ethiopia.

He had a need and he knew that his need was in relation to God. It led him to come to Jerusalem to worship. Has anybody here a need? Has anybody here never felt a need in relation to God?

People may persuade themselves that they have no need in relation to God, people we meet daily, people we work with, people at school may not even think about that, they may just dismiss the whole matter. Have you ever felt that you have a need in relation to God?

My friend, if you have never felt that, believe me you have, you have a very great need.

Do you know that the day is coming when you and I and all of us are going to have to meet God? Does that worry you? There was a time when that worried me a great deal. I was going to have to meet God and what could I say to God, and what would God say to me? What would He require from me? But this man had a need and he went to Jerusalem to worship. What did he find in Jerusalem? Did he find the answer to his need? He obviously did not find the answer to his questions, because he came away from

Jerusalem with his Bible, and he was reading his Bible and he did not understand it. He had a need and he did not understand what he read.

One thing I would say is, if you do not understand your Bible, do not stop reading it. When you read your Bible, first of all turn to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to show you something out of the scriptures and then read it, and read it slowly. If you ask in genuineness and you read slowly, you will find that before very long, something will come into your soul that you have never seen before, some glory of Jesus will come into your soul. Keep reading your Bible.

This man was reading the prophet Isaiah and he must have been reading it for quite a while because he had come to this wonderful chapter 53. Philip joined the chariot and he said, "Dost thou then know what thou art reading of? And he said, How should I then be able unless some one guide me?" Who was the One of whom Isaiah spoke? There is one Man who is the key to the whole of scripture. When you read the scriptures remember that, that the whole of scripture speaks of Him. It does not matter where you read, Old Testament or New Testament, it speaks of one blessed Man. Here in Isaiah it was directly speaking of Him. Others have pointed out that the theme of the Old Testament is Christ. If you take the first five books of the Bible you find that the central theme is the Ark, and what is centred on the Ark, and how the children of Israel are held in relation to the Ark. That is the theme; it is Christ. If you read the historical books you find that the central theme there is David: what a wonderful figure of Christ David is. You read the Psalms, and you find that there is a testimony there to what God has in mind in a Man, a Man of His choice, the One whom He has established on Zion, the hill of His holiness, the righteous Man. You find the Son of Man; it is all Christ throughout the Psalms. You read the Prophets and you find the spirit of the prophets is the testimony of Jesus. It is Jesus throughout the scriptures.

Philip says, "Dost thou then know what thou art reading of?" The man says, "concerning whom does the prophet say this?". The

whole of the scriptures has one glorious subject and that is Christ.

This was Jesus in His humiliation. He says here, "He was led as a sheep to slaughter, and as a lamb is dumb in presence of him that shears him, thus he opens not his mouth". What glories of Jesus are coming out here. You say, surely it is the wickedness of man that is there, but it was the glories of Jesus that allowed Himself to be led as a sheep to the slaughter. Think of that, knowing what was before Him, knowing what was in the hearts of men, and knowing what was in the mind of God, He allowed Himself to be led. Think of it, the Son of God was led! Look in the gospels at the number of references to the Lord Jesus being led. It says they led Him away to Pilate. Think of the Lord Jesus being led away, they led Him from the garden, they led Him to Pilate, think of Him being led by men in their wickedness and hatred as, fulfilling the will of God, He allowed Himself to be led. What a blessed object for our contemplation, the One whose very word made them fall away backwards to the ground. He said, "I am He", and they fell backwards to the ground.

What power was in that glorious One and yet He allowed Himself to be led. Wicked men led him, but He was led above all by the will of His God and Father. He was led as a sheep to slaughter. Think of the perfection of that type! In Isaiah it says, "as a lamb", bringing out the tenderness, but here it is the sheep, the full maturity that was seen in Jesus. There was nothing diminutive in the offering of Jesus, it was a full thought, "he was led as a sheep to the slaughter". The sensitivity of the Lamb comes out here in the presence of him that shears him, "as a lamb is dumb in presence of him that shears him, thus he opens not his mouth". Think of the Lord Jesus submitting to the will of His God and Father; He did that throughout His life. He submitted to His Father's will. That is what characterised Him as coming into manhood, He had actually come into a condition in which it would not have been right to exercise the will of His own, certainly not a will that was contrary to that of His God and Father, but He submitted to His Father. He was as the "lamb is dumb in presence of him that shears him, thus he opens not his mouth. In His humiliation His judgment has been taken away".

Think of His humiliation! Beloved, we see man's humiliation and

that is a result of sin, but think of *His* humiliation, it was a result of moral excellence and perfection. In His humiliation His judgment has been taken away. Men considered it was not even worth giving Him a fair trial; His judgment was taken away. He was not given the normal rights that a man is given; His judgment was taken away. Think of all that the Lord Jesus went through in His sufferings here, “in His humiliation, His judgment has been taken away, and who shall declare his generation?” Who shall declare it? Is there a generation like that? There was never another like Him, there could not be. He stands alone, unique, “who shall declare His generation?” He is incomparable and no other could be found with Him in these circumstances. There is no other with Him. Then His life is taken from the earth.

Think of that life! His life is taken from the earth. The prophet says, “he was cut off from the land of the living”, and that is what Israel would have seen, that is what was seen publicly. He was hung upon the cross, and He was crucified. He was cut off out of the land of the living. Publicly that life had ended. Men said that that was the end, “when will He die and His Name perish?” When He was crucified they were glad that He was cut off from the land of the living. But in the New Testament it does not say that. “His life was taken from the earth”. Where was that life taken? Was it possible that that life could be extinguished? Would God allow such a life to be cut off and be no more? Would God allow such a thing to happen? He went into death, having done the great work of atonement, but it was not possible that He should be held by its power. Think of the work of Jesus as going into death.

This does not here refer directly to the work of Jesus in His atoning sufferings, but we have the light of that. Doubtless that came into what Philip announced to him, “opening his mouth and beginning from that scripture, announced the glad tidings of Jesus to him”. What are the glad tidings of Jesus – that that blessed One whose moral excellence had been seen in such an amazing way, had taken upon Himself the whole matter which stood out between man and God. Are you conscious of the fact that there is something

between man and God? There was a great issue that needed to be resolved between man and God. Are you happy about the fact that the day is coming when we are going to meet God? If you are not happy why is it? Is it because there is an issue between man and God that you have not faced in your own soul? My friend, do not let that continue, there is no reason for that to continue. The One whom we have spoken of here whose life was taken from the earth, laid the basis on which that issue has been met fully, not just for your satisfaction, but for God's. He has laid the basis in His work when He was here upon that cross of shame, men had done their worst, and expressed their hatred in the most violent way against the Lord Jesus and there He was lifted up between heaven and earth, and there as a Man in holy perfection, He took upon Himself the whole question of sin and sins. The sins of all who trust in Him were borne in His body on the cross when God expressed His holy judgment against sin. How wonderful that is! Think of it, those three hours of darkness He bore God's His holy judgment against sin. Remember that cry, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" Why should He be forsaken? He had been the object of divine pleasure. We have been speaking about Him today, as the One who was supremely the object of the Father's love. At that time, those three hours of darkness, shall I tell you something? He was the object of God's judgment. Can you think about it? That One who had so perfectly glorified Him upon the earth should there be held up and become the focus of God's judgment. All the feelings that God had against sin, all His holy wrath against sin, were borne by Jesus. He was lifted up there, He gave Himself so that God should have a righteous basis on which judgment of sin could be met. God could not have expressed His wrath upon a perfect Man otherwise but Jesus was made sin. As lifted up on the cross, He came under the curse of the law. He bore that curse. Think of God as writing into the law through the pen of Moses saying, "cursed is everyone that is hanged upon the tree". The Lord Jesus lifted up on that terrible cross came under the curse of the law, though He were perfect in Himself, though He had magnified the law and made it honourable, but he was made sin. God could direct His judgment against sin

upon Him. Oh what a Saviour! Think of Him going that way. Why did He do it? He did it for you and for me. He became the object of God's hatred of sin for you and for me, because if He had not done so, you and I would have had to bear the judgment for our sins eternally. There would have been no way out. The only answer was in a perfect One, the perfect Man, who there upon the cross gave Himself in order that all who look to Him should be free of their sins.

Have you looked upon Him there? Have you seen Him there upon the cross, the One who endured the wrath of God for those three hours? At the end of those three hours He committed His spirit to the Father and He laid down His life, He went into death, and then He shed His precious blood. Think of the blood of Jesus being shed. Why was the blood shed? The blood shed is evidence that the life has been laid down. The shed blood is the testimony to the fact that the life has been laid down and the blood is precious in the sight of God because it shows how perfectly acceptable that life was to God. There was nothing in it with which God could find fault. Some men would find fault with Him but a repeated testimony is that they said, "he does all things well". Pilate said, "I find no fault in this man".

That was not through lack of looking or searching for it. Another went even further, "this man has done nothing amiss". God's testimony is greater, "in whom I have found my delight". Think of the testimony of God, and that life in which God had found His delight, was laid down in death and His precious blood was shed upon the cross, and that blood remains before God as a testimony to the fact that that life has been laid down in answer to God's holy and righteous claims. He had no need to lay His life down for Himself, it was in answer to God's holy and just claims upon man, upon whom the whole question of sin had come. Think of the blood of Jesus!

We often look at the figure of old, the tabernacle system – if you were to approach the tabernacle system you would go into the courtyard, a great courtyard there was, and the first thing before you was a brazen altar, and that was where sacrifices were offered. You and I, as common people, would not be able to go any further than that. But if you were a priest you could. You could serve at the altar

and there the sacrifices were offered up, each speaking of the Lord Jesus. But then beyond the altar was the laver; the priest had to wash his hands and feet and he could go into the holy place. The holy place was as far as he could go. But the high priest could, once a year, go through the final barrier, and when he went in it was in relation to atoning for the sins of the people, and he went in, through that veil into the holy of holies. What was in his hands was the blood, speaking of the blood of Jesus. There is no other way in which we can get into the presence of God, and he went in with the blood. He sprinkled that blood there upon the mercy-seat, and over the mercy-seat were the cherubim, and the cherubim's faces were turned towards the mercy-seat. It is wonderful to think of. The cherubim stand for God's rights, and their faces were turned towards the mercy-seat. There was a place where God's rights were met – the blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat. They saw the blood, it was there where God's claims were met and God sets forth Christ in this way. He sets Him forth as a mercy-seat. It shows that God's rights have been met. His rights have been met as to the past, involving His forbearance in respect of the passing by of the sins gone before, and His rights met as to the present, showing that God is just and the justifier of Him that is of the faith of Jesus. We see it there in the mercy-seat. What is the mercy-seat? It is Jesus. Christ Himself having accomplished the work of redemption, the blood is there, it has been shed and is there before God, and every divine claim has been met.

But something else happened, the priest sprinkled that blood before the mercy-seat. He sprinkled it not only on the mercy-seat, but *before* it, and he sprinkled it not once but seven times. Why did he do that? So that you should have full assurance. Through the work of Jesus we are not brought into a system of barriers such as the tabernacle had, but the way has been made by which the entrance into the presence of God Himself can be known, and it is sprinkled seven times so that you should be fully assured about it, that there should be no doubt with you that the work of Jesus is sufficient and the blood of Jesus is sufficient for God. Have you faith

in the blood of Jesus? Have you seen the work that He has done upon the cross, and seen the blood that was shed, and known and embraced in your soul that that blood was shed for you? Do you know that if you have not put your faith in the One who shed His precious blood, you have not even begun? On what basis will you appear before God when we all appear before Him? On what basis will you stand then? Beloved, there is a sure foundation, a refuge of the lost, Christ the Rock of our salvation, the One who has shed His blood and in the shedding of His precious blood we have the basis on which we can be free before God, with no trace of sin. It is even more than that. When God justifies a person, it is more than just wiping out the sins; it is that the person comes over to God's side and God says, I am going to support this person. You might do something – you might damage my car. I can say, do not worry about it, I will not say anything about it, maybe I will forgive you. That is a precious thing if I go that far, but every time I see my car I will see the mark on it. I have not removed it, and if at any time after that somebody may comment on it, I could not deny that it had happened. But justification goes further than that, that through the work of Jesus our sins are no longer accounted to us, Jesus has borne them all away and God supports the person. It says, Who shall bring an accusation against God's elect, it is God who justifies. God is the one against whom we have sinned, and God justifies, He takes your side. Think of that. God is taking your side. It is not even the Lord Jesus who justifies; it is Christ who has died, He has done the work, but it is God who justifies, the great Judge of all, He is the One who justifies. Think of the blessed God going as far as that, as to take your side, even though you have offended Him so much, and done so much against Him. Yet through the work of Jesus He has a just and perfect basis upon which He can justify you and set you up in righteousness before Him, so that God is just and the justifier of Him that is of the faith of Jesus. It is based on the work of Jesus, on the shedding of His precious blood.

The eunuch read, "His life is taken from the earth". The Lord Jesus went into death, He was buried. When the Lord Jesus was

buried, that was really a sign that the condition of manhood that He had come into was put out of sight from God. He came into flesh and blood condition; that is the condition we are in, He came into this condition, and He was buried. In the burial of Jesus we see that God has ended one kind of man altogether and we see that He has put him out of sight. You say, Jesus Himself being put out of sight from God? If the One who had pleased God so much upon the earth was put out of sight, how right it is that every man must be put out of sight. The eunuch speaks about that, if such a One's life was taken from the earth, he said there is only one answer for me. He said "Behold water; what hinders my being baptised?" I have to go out of sight. If He was put out of sight, then I have to go out of sight. But the life of Jesus was taken from the earth. That life continues, it continues in perfection. In the previous chapter we see Stephen, a man who had a glimpse of that Man in His glorious life in heaven.

The life of Jesus was taken from the earth, the perfection, the uniqueness of it was such that He could not remain in death. God would not have it so, God's feelings for Him were so great that He could never be satisfied with Jesus in death. He raised Him up by His own glory and exalted and set Him at His own right hand. That life was taken from the earth, that life is there before God for His eternal delight and pleasure, that life upon which God Himself satisfies His affections constantly and will eternally do so, was taken from the earth in order to be continued before Him.

Isaiah goes further than that, he says, "he shall see a seed".

His generation is Himself alone, but He shall see a seed. That means that there are others who are coming into view who are of His own order, who have their origins in Himself. It is like the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying, it abides alone. When He was here in the days of His flesh, He abode alone, but He died, and "if it die it brings forth much fruit". "He shall see a seed, He shall prolong His days". How those days are prolonged upon the earth, they are prolonged in lives of men and women like you and me.

Those who have their faith and trust in Him who know what it is to have the gift of the Holy Spirit and who seek to live here in the light

of the Man in the glory, those are the ones in whom you see those days prolonged, His seed. That life which was taken from the earth and is treasured in heaven, is to be seen here in character in the seed that remains.

We see that in this man. He went into the waters of baptism and as he came up out of the waters he no longer needed the servant who was with him. Philip was taken away, he had other work to do. The Spirit of God would say, Philip that is done, now you have some more work to do, but the eunuch, what does he do now? Does he go back to Jerusalem? The city that had rejected the Lord? No! He has a link with a Man in the glory. There is another centre now in his life. He went on his way rejoicing. Would he ever go on his way rejoicing if his life was centred in things of earth? Believe me, my friend, I can tell you that the things on earth will only bring disappointment. You may get temporary pleasure, but the things of the earth will only bring disappointment. Even the greatest things naturally will come to an end. But this man went on his way rejoicing, he had a link with a Man in the glory. He had a link with a Man who had accomplished the work of redemption, who had solved every matter for Him and for God and now he was to live here in a life of testimony, a life of responsibility, connected with a Man who had once been here, who was rejected from this scene and who was now enthroned in glory. Beloved, may that be the portion of each one of us. For His Name's sake.

EDINBURGH

8 June 2002

“THIS MAN SHALL BE PEACE”

John Gray

Micah 5: 1-6

Throughout the dispensation, there have been attacks on the Person of Christ. Some of us were speaking recently of some of sects which deny the deity of Christ, and we need to be aware of them and stand against them, and see that we are clear about the glory of the One who has come into manhood. As we had in our hymn, He brought into expression “a life divine below”. That was Christ in manhood here. So we get the expression here as to the “Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity”. There are some who consider Christ to be a good man, but nothing more than that. There were some, among early church leaders, who could not understand that a Person of the Godhead could come into manhood, and so they said that Jesus Christ was a man, although above other men, but He was not God, He was below God. That was the false doctrine which riddled the church at the very beginning. Hence we need to guard and enjoy the fact that God in the Person of Jesus has come into manhood. I think we get fresh impressions of this particularly as we are at the Supper, as the Lord comes among us. I think that is the time when I personally receive the greatest impressions of the fact of the deity of Christ, that there is a Man who has come to be near to us, who has died for us, who has been raised for us, and is in glory, and He has never altered His Person one iota. That is important, because the enemy is against the fact that God has made Himself known a Man.

This scripture brings out very clearly, though in small conditions; “thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, little to be among the thousands of Judah”. Not exactly the thousands of Israel, but the thousands of Judah, that is that there was an area of divine choice.

Our Lord sprang out of Judah; scripture speaks of Him as the “lion which is of the tribe of Judah”, Rev 5: 5. But out of these thousands, there is “little Bethlehem”. That indicates the small conditions, the poor conditions into which the Lord came in manhood here. But it

goes on to say, “out of thee” – that is out of Bethlehem – “shall he come forth unto me”. How great that is, the greatness of what God is ordering, what God is bringing forward in the divine economy of love – “shall he come forth unto me who is to be ruler in Israel”. The Jews did not accept Him as ruler. Men generally, including the Romans, cast Him out as a criminal on the cross, regarding Him as anything but a Ruler. But He will be the Ruler, He is the King of kings, as someone referred to Him on Lord’s Day, ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’. It is a fine thing to have that established, not only as a fact in our souls, beloved brethren, but as something we enjoy, something we appreciate.

But I want to stress this further reference, “whose goings forth are from of old”. Now we might say that “from of old” takes us back to the beginning of time. Think of divine goings forth in the period from the beginning of time. But it does not stop at that, it goes back to “from the days of eternity”. It is to stress what John says in his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word”, John 1: 1. We often enjoy that. Not that the One we know as the Lord Jesus began then, but “in the beginning was the Word”, that is He was there at the beginning, He existed before time.

Now this brings out the glory of what the prophet says “out of thee”, that is out of Judah, “shall he come forth”. It is to stress the glory of this Person. Think of the glory of the title that we get in the Scriptures, “I am He” or “I the Same”. You have it repeated in Isaiah (see chap 41: 4) bringing out the unchangeable character of divine Persons, and the unchanging existence of Jesus as to His Person.

That is what has been laid on my heart tonight, and this scripture has been in my mind following what we enjoyed on Lord’s Day. We need to increase in our apprehension and response to Him as He comes in among us. The greatness of the Person who comes in lays hold of us and we express it in worship. As He comes in, we lay hold of the fact that this is the Person who is the Same and has always been the Same – has always existed. You will remember in the time of the Lord’s life here, particularly in the garden of Gethsemane (although there were other occasions when He referred

to this Name), John records how when they came to take Him, they asked which was the Lord, and He said "I am He" and they went away backwards and fell to the ground because of the Person who was there. Although a Man in humble and lowly circumstances and in meekness, He had remained unchanged in His Person. He says to the Pharisees who questioned Him, "Before Abraham was, I *am*".

I think that in the presence of all that proceeds in the world, all that proceeds even in Christendom, we need to understand the glory of the Person with whom we have to do. He has come near to us as a Man to reassure us, not only to die for our sins, and to be raised for us, but to bring us into the most wonderful things, into the presence of His God and Father, by the power of the Spirit, that we might touch now what is eternal in character, as to praise and worship.

In this scripture, it speaks about the troops, "Now gather thyself in troops". That was the Assyrian, the king of the north, and it speaks about them laying siege against Judah and Jerusalem. If you transfer this in its moral application to the saints at the present time, there is a lot against the saints, there are things working in the world, not just on the line of pleasure with which men are obsessed, but there are evil things working. The attack of Satan is against what is of Christ and what is of the assembly, what relates to God Himself. Satan has always been against God, and whatever God has created or introduced, Satan is against it. So that we can see that the reference here to the troops of the king of Assyria are the forces of what is against God. But we are to take comfort in this fact, that this is the One who is "from of old, from days of eternity". The enemy cannot touch what is divine. He cannot touch divine Persons, because God is supreme. We have to do with the God who is supreme. I think that is encouraging. I would encourage our hearts to contemplate more the fact that the Man who came to Bethlehem's manger, the Man who died on the cross, the Man who was raised again and was seen by the disciples during the forty days and was received up in glory is none other than God in the Person of the Son.

That is a wonderful thing to lay hold of, and it also brings out that He is the One, and He alone, through whom we know and enjoy God, made known to us in love as Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Person of the Son, we know Him “whose goings forth are from of old, from the days of eternity”. Only in that way can conditions of peace remain among us, as we maintain the glory of the Person of Christ. It is not only that we enjoy His manhood, but we know the glory of the Person with whom we have to do, and thus enjoy the company of God in Jesus as Man. He is coming into this setting in Bethlehem, that persons might know God. Then it says “this man shall be Peace”. Well, peace is in the assembly. You do not find peace in Christendom. It is sad that you will not find it there, but you do find it in the assembly. I am not excluding believers in these conditions that may not have light as to it. But let us enjoy what we have, and let us hold fast to it, beloved brethren, because it is centred on the fact that Jesus has become Man, but He remains God eternally. May He help us in it for His Name’s sake.

GRANGEMOUTH

THE LORD'S DELIBERATE MOVEMENTS

John Spinks

Luke 4: 16-22; Mark 12: 41-44

I was encouraged by the word we have just had to read these scriptures, involving the Lord's deliberate movements. I think that there is great profit in following them. I have been thinking especially of the scripture in Hebrews which speaks of how the Son "set Himself down", Heb 1: 3. I think we need to get in our souls an impression of the Person of the Son, the One who has divine prerogative and is able to do things Himself. The Son is a very wonderful Name involving the glory of His Person. We can think of Him as the Son of God, involving a whole universe for God's pleasure, and others who are related in that position. Then the Son of Man involves His universal dominion, what He is on man's behalf. But I think that when we have Him referred to as the Son, it involves the glory of His Person, standing in all His majesty and glory. I was encouraged by what our brother has said, because I feel it is greatly needed in these days; it would give great stability in our souls when we see Who has come in. God is speaking in Son "whom He has established heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds, who being the effulgence of His glory and the expression of His substance". What wealth is in that, dear brethren!

I feel that these things need to be contemplated. Think of the One who has come near to us, the One who has brought the grace of God into our souls, who has transformed our lives, who has become the great corner-stone. I think that we need to be like John, who could say "we have contemplated His glory, the glory of an only begotten with a father", John 1: 14. Then the scripture in Hebrews says, "having made by Himself the purification of sins". It is not so much the Lord as acting on God's behalf, but what He has done Himself, having divine rights and prerogative. He having "made by Himself the purification of sins, set Himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high". What a thing that is, "set Himself down". It might have seemed sufficient to say that He sat down, but it says

that He “set himself down”. I think that the great emphasis is on the glory of the Person, “set Himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high”. How wonderful it is to get the glory of the Person into our souls, the One who has done it by Himself. Only a divine Person could do it, only a divine Person could assume to take this wonderful initiative and clear the whole universe of sin. I think the setting Himself down involves that He takes a fixed position. He is the centre of God’s universe and He has done it Himself, dear brethren. He came forth from with the Father, He came into this world and took up everything for God’s glory, and settled the whole sin question, having “made by Himself the purification of sins, set Himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high, taking a place by so much better than angels”. I just touch on that so that we may be impressed by the glory of the Son.

I read in Luke’s gospel because again we get the thought of the Lord sitting. This involves that He is establishing a position. It is interesting to see the different positions the Lord takes up. In verse 16, He stood up to read. It is very interesting to go through the scripture and see the places where the Lord was standing and sitting. I think the thought of the Lord standing is that He makes Himself available. Here He is the vessel of grace, available to man.

You see it in John 7, the Lord “stood and cried, If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink”. He was standing there and making an appeal. Then in Acts, in Stephen’s address, the Lord was standing.

He was ready to come back; if the Jew had received Him, He would have come back to them. Then in Laodicea, the Lord stands and knocks. I think that the Lord standing involves that He is ready to move, in all the grace of His heart. But I think that the Lord sitting conveys that He is fixing a position; that is how it appeals to me, He is establishing a position. His movements are very deliberate here.

He stood up to read and the book was given to Him. “Having unrolled the book, he found the place where it was written”. How wonderful it is that the Lord is establishing this great principle of grace. He is the vessel of grace, the One through whom the grace of God is coming into humanity. It says that, “he found the place

where it was written". He reads the section which bears directly on His position; "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son", Gal 4: 4. He is establishing this great principle of grace, "And having rolled up the book, when He had delivered it up to the attendant, He sat down". It appeals to me that His sitting down is a deliberate movement and He is establishing the principle that is to govern this dispensation. Nothing could alter it. At the end of the dispensation, He will in principle take that book up again, and He will read it, and it will be judgment. But it seems to me that He is establishing this great principle of grace. He is here in all His glory as the vessel of grace "the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him". Then it says further down that they "wondered at the words of grace which were coming out of His mouth". He is making Himself available to men and establishing the dispensation, and it will never cease as long as the Lord is on the Father's throne.

In Mark's gospel we see Him sitting opposite the treasury. There is something very beautiful in that. Again He is taking a position, He is assessing things in the light of what was in this woman. The Lord is really anticipating what was going to be the result of His death. If we go through the gospels, we see that the Lord was anticipating the full result of His death. In John's gospel it says that "He came out from God and was going to God", John 13: 3. The Lord anticipates a completed work. Here He is looking with great delight at this woman. "I say unto you that this poor widow has cast in more than all who have cast into the treasury". I think that we can see that the Lord is anticipating the full result of the gospel, the full result of grace. We saw in Luke the fulness of the grace of God coming to man, but here is the result. The Lord is getting great pleasure from it. I think that we can carry this right through to the present dispensation. The Lord is sitting "having ... sat down" but what is he finding? He is finding the full result of grace; I think this woman represents that. She is a poor widow, but what a result! The old dispensation could not contain what this woman had. But Christianity is a system where the grace of God is having a full result. My exercise is that we should measure ourselves against this

woman. We tend to go half way, to put some in and keep some for ourselves. But this would answer to bringing "the whole tithe into the treasure-house", Mal. 3:10. I think we need to measure ourselves and see that we are on this line, of not holding back. You think of men like Paul, who held nothing back. As we come near the end of the dispensation, what is called for in the present day is that we hold nothing back, that we put in everything that we have. That is what is called for. The Lord as sitting down here is not exactly occupied with the others who are putting in, but He is occupied with this woman. I think that the Lord takes tremendous delight in persons who are on this line and He has great joy in those who are the full results of grace. May we be among them.

GRANGEMOUTH

AT A MARRIAGE

(i) The Beginning

M.H.Tucker

Matthew 19: 3-9; John 2: 1-12; Psalm 118: 26

In reading these well-known Scriptures, dear brethren, one had in mind to draw attention to two main points – the first is what obtained at the *beginning*, and the second is the value of divine blessing, and by extension the value of the blessing that the saints of God are privileged to give on such an occasion as this.

In Matthew 19 the Lord Jesus, in answer to the question of the religious leaders, refers to what was obtained in the beginning and our minds are thereby recalled to the faithfulness of the Creator God with Whom we all have to do, as the One Who considered for man's loneliness at the outset in providing an help-mate for him, marriage being God's institution for man, and divine blessing being definitely associated with it. If we turn to the passage in Genesis from which the Lord quotes we find that God blessed them – the man and the woman – it was the blessing of a Creator God. One has often felt in this connection that blessing is attached to the marriage tie quite irrespective of Christianity, and we may thank God that this institution has been preserved as it has been right down through the ages.

In spite of the hard-heartedness of man to which reference is made in Matthew 19 verse 18, and despite also the corruption that has come in through sin, God has maintained this precious relationship for man and his blessing still stands connected with it.

So we are confident that as stepping out as husband and wife today, our brother and sister do so knowing that in their souls they receive the blessing of a Creator God. God's thought is also that what was established in the beginning should be continued and that we may ever keep in mind the divine ideal. "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate". May our brother and sister,

notwithstanding all the tests inseparable from this joint pathway that they are about to tread, ever preserve in their souls that divine ideal!

When we come to the passage in John it is remarkable that the Spirit of God again refers to the thought of *beginning*. “This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed on Him”. Here we are in the presence of what is intended to typify Christianity, for the Lord Jesus has come into this matter and given it a fresh lustre. That marriage feast in Cana of Galilee He graced with His own presence, the couple concerned inviting Him there, and His disciples too. We are delighted that our brother and sister desire to have the presence of the Lord on such an occasion as this, and the presence of His people too.

The main feature of this passage is that the Lord supplied the deficiency that existed. Even on that bright marriage day there was a deficiency and the Lord supplied it and this is in keeping with the whole of John’s gospel from which we learn that the glory of the Lord Jesus is such that He is able to meet any and every deficiency that there be in this poor world of ours. The Lord came into this marriage scene and He imparted to it that which was going to abide. Our beloved brother has referred in prayer to the fact that we are in a scene where things decline and run out on the line of nature, but the Lord Jesus has made it possible for blessing of a spiritual kind to be enjoyed which is beyond death and which is therefore superior to even the best that nature can provide.

And so it says, “This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed on Him”. “After this He descended to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brethren and His disciples, and there they abode *not many days*”. I believe there is a suggestion there of the way we should take up natural joys – we should do so in the sense of not being detained by them. There is a danger of being detained by them, but:

Our path is on with earnest haste,
Lord in Thy rest to live.

And we give our brother and sister credit for having the divine goal in view.

I would add here that not only can our brother and sister enjoy the blessings that a Creator God and a Saviour Lord bring into this relationships, but they can enjoy too the blessing which that other Comforter of Whom Jesus speaks can afford them, as the One Who is ever ready to be called to their side at every time of need. I think it is not without significance that one who typifies the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was seen in association with the woman who was shortly to become a wife. I refer to Genesis 24, which has been the subject of so much ministry in recent years and I feel it fitting to bring that aspect of divine blessing to the notice of our brother and sister so that they may realise the possibility of enjoying the threefold blessing of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in this new relationship.

I would add one more word to complete the matter. The saints also are privileged to bestow a blessing on such an occasion as this, and that is why I read those striking words from Psalm 118. Literally it refers to a future day, but I believe in the spirit of it we can take the words upon our lips and say, "We have blessed you out of the house of Jehovah". The blessing of the saints is indeed worth having.

One is reminded on such an occasion as this of the faithfulness of God to succeeding generations for one recalls one's own marriage in this very room thirty three years ago when older brethren who were themselves grandfathers bestowed their blessing, and now we who are ourselves grandfathers can participate in a similar occasion and say to our beloved brother and sister, "We have blessed you out of the house of Jehovah".

28 June 1952

(ii) The End

M.H.Tucker

Luke 22: 35-37; Deuteronomy 8: 2-4, 16; Job 31: 40; 42: 12; Numbers 23: 10; 1 Corinthians 15: 24-28

Those of us who were privileged to be present this afternoon will remember that among other things that came before us on that occasion was the blessedness of that which obtained *in the beginning* of things. We are reminded of God's beginning in creation and what He ordained in His considerate forethought for His creature in regard to the question of marriage, and we were likewise engaged with the lustre that the Lord Jesus Himself shed on a marriage occasion when it was said of Him, "This *beginning* of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed on him".

We have of course prayed for our dear brother and sister at the *beginning* of this fresh path that they are each taking this day for they are starting out on a path that neither of them has hitherto trod.

It is a beginning, and it is right that we should pray for them and make their beginning as auspicious as possible. We are all thankful to God for the sense of divine blessing which marked the occasion, but, dear brethren, what I have to say tonight relates to another side of the truth, namely the question of *the end*, which is of equal importance, indeed one might say it is of greater importance because we read in the book of Ecclesiastes that "better is the end of a thing than the beginning", Eccl 7 :8. The question of how we are going to finish is of supreme importance.

As we grow older and the end of the road comes into clearer view, the more we feel the need for finishing our course with joy.

The end of some things is an end of shame, resulting in judgment. We read for instance in the epistle of Peter, "For the time of having the judgment begin from the house of God is come; but if first from us, what shall be the *end* of those who obey not the glad tidings of God?", 1 Peter 4: 17.

We read too that the nation of Israel in the apostacy in the last days is likened to a devil-dispossessed man whose house is swept and garnished but to which the unclean spirit will return with seven-fold force causing the last state of that man to be worse than the first. The Spirit of God is looking on to the awful apostacy that will develop and become full-blown in the last days.

I do not wish, however, to occupy you with that kind of thing save by way of warning, but I just wish to say a word, with the gracious help of the Lord and of the Holy Spirit, in connection with these scriptures, each of which refers to the thought of the *end*.

In Luke 22, the Lord Jesus is speaking as Man and it is very affecting to take account of His language as the day of the cross drew nearer. And He said to His own, "The things concerning me have an end". That spotless lowly life of Jesus lived here for the pleasure and glory of God for thirty three and a half years (last three and a half years of which were employed in public service to God and man) had to terminate. What pleasure God found in the lowly life of Jesus! It was a life that morally was worthy of being perpetuated, but, dear brethren, it came to an end. Even the life of Jesus after the flesh came to an end. That life which was a thing of beauty on the earth in the sight of God had to be taken from the earth. It was a life of flesh and blood in which you and I live but which was unforfeited in His case because in Him was no sin nor guile and He had the right to live for ever, but He chose to lay down His life in death. It was brought to an end. The Lord did it feelingly.

We have only to read Psalm 102 to take note of the holy sufferings of His soul when He said, "My God, take Me not away in the midst of my days", Ps. 102: 24. It was part of the Lord's very perfection to deprecate being cut off, but He was cut off because the will of God demanded it, because otherwise you and I would never have been brought into blessing. We have to remember that the Lord Jesus stooped into the condition of Manhood not to improve it, but to end it. Why? Because we ourselves have broken down in that condition.

We have dishonoured God as to our responsibility in that condition.

It was moreover never God's original thought that the flesh and

blood condition should be perpetuated; His thought was that it should be ended vicariously in the Person of His beloved Son.

So the Lord Jesus went into death to close up the old order of man that would never do for God. There is a saying that 'What cannot be mended must be ended', and that applies with special force to man after the flesh; tested in every way as he was by God and only found wanting. The Lord Jesus Himself was the only One to give full delight to God in that condition, but in closing up the life of Jesus God did not bring that condition to an end ingloriously but triumphantly. He went into death, laying down that life which He was never to resume in conditions of flesh and blood but we all know that He has taken His life again in new conditions, and He would associate us along with Himself in those conditions. He said, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself", John 10: 18. He laid down His life of flesh and blood in death and He has taken His life not beyond death – a life that death can never have to say to at all – and He links us with Himself beyond death. I wish, dear brethren, however, to emphasise the fact that the closing up of the one condition was done feelingly by the Lord. It caused Him infinite sorrow to do it, and it should affect every one of us to note that the things concerning Christ had an end in that way. Just as the victim in the sin offering was wholly consumed outside the camp, so Jesus as the Victim came under the unsparing judgment of God and has gone in that sense but He has taken His place in a new way beyond death having Himself consumed the judgment.

I will now pass on to the Scripture in Deuteronomy which I feel applies to us all. We are reminded very happily this afternoon in one of Mr. Darby's hymns that as passing through the desert we have to do with a patient God:

In the desert God will teach thee
What the God that thou has found –
Patient, gracious, powerful, holy:
All His grace shall there abound.

Moses in chapter 8 of this book reviews the forty years passage through the desert, and reminds Israel of the way that God had humbled them and proved them, all to the end that He might do them good at their latter end. What a blessed God we have to do with, dear brethren: for His purpose was to bring them into His own land – a spacious and large land flowing with milk and honey – the Promised Land of His purpose – thus doing them good in their latter end. That is God's thought for His people as a whole. One loves to think of the Church of Christ journeying through this scene:

Here on earth beset by foes,
Well beloved by Christ her Head,
May Thy church in love's repose
Her appointed journey tread.

I believe it is in these latter days that God will do us good in a very special sense, for if we are in the most testing days at the end we are in the most blessed days and God intends to do us good in our latter end.

The passages in the book of Job are very similar, except that the individual side is there stressed. It is remarkable that the Spirit of God should have devoted forty chapters to the consideration of God's ways with such a one as Job. The whole book well repays close reading, I commend it to the study of all and especially to the young people. We see God's gracious dealings with Job. He was a remarkable man, perhaps one of the best specimens of humanity that lived in that day, and God allowed Satan to try him to the uttermost. He was robbed of his possessions, his family, and his health, and in addition to these serious losses, he suffered through the tempting of his wife, who suggested that there was nothing left to him to do but to "curse God and die". Yet Job stood firm in his integrity, and the ensuing chapters show what God was aiming at.

There was a certain lack in that man's soul that only God could perceive. He had done well, but God wanted him to do better still.

In the same way the Lord Jesus, in speaking of the Father's discipline and the vine, says it is the bough that brings forth fruit that

receives attention. It is purged. Why? That it might bring forth *more* fruit.

Well, God saw there was a need in Job's soul; that while he feared God and eschewed evil he yet trusted in some way in himself and his righteousness, and what his afflictions did not bring out, his three friends did by their arguments. In replying to them Job poured out his whole soul in bitterness, and justified himself. His friends could find no answer for what he said, and the time came when he said himself, "the words of Job are ended". A very good ending too. It is a very good thing if we each of us come to that point when all attempt at self-justification is ended and God can begin to speak; first of all in Elihu, who was made to speak to Job in God's stead, and secondly the speaking of God Himself personally who followed up that of Elihu. One would covet thus to speak to individuals or to the saints collectively so that God can follow it up. What the three friends were unable to accomplish, through God's grace was accomplished through the further speakings of Elihu and God Himself, and Job was brought to the point to which God wished to bring him. Job says, "I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (ch. 42:5,6)

This is the only right condition of soul for any one of us, and the question is whether we have all arrived at it. It may account for the lack of spiritual progress with some of us – that we have not reached that point. Mr. Darby was asked at the end of his life what had kept him for so many years, and he replied, 'I can only suppose that I started my spiritual history with a sense of my utter vileness'.

Well, Job was brought to that, and God blessed him, "And Jehovah blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning". James in his epistle speaks of God's end in the matter. There was Job's end, but there was God's end. James says, "ye have heard of the endurance of Job, and seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is full of tender compassion and pitiful", James 5: 11.

God loves us too well, dear brethren, not to allow His discipline, whatever it may be, to have full effect. We would often spoil His

work ourselves by interfering to bring in relief prematurely, but God comes in just in time.

He never is before His time
And never is behind.

God thus blessed the latter end of Job.

In Numbers 23 verse 10 we have the confession of a man who, alas, had no vital part in the things of God, although God used him as His own mouthpiece to bless His people when the enemy sought to curse them. God turned the curse into a blessing for Balaam is made to pronounce a fourfold benediction upon the people of God. He sees them in his first parable as a *separated* people, in his second as a *justified* people, in his third as a *beautified* people and in his fourth as a *victorious* people. God in effect makes that man to see His own work in the saints and one of the things Balaam says is this, "Let my soul die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his". What a solemn thing to say, the implication being that there is a great difference between the death of the Christian and the death of one who goes out of this world without Christ and without God. What comparison can there be? Every Christian's death should be a triumph. The last end of a Christian is most glorious for he is ushered into the presence of the One he has known and loved and served. Well might Balaam say, "Let my soul die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his".

I said at the beginning that a lot depends on the way we finish. I would refer in this connection to Hebrews 11. Every one of the men of faith in that chapter finished well, particularly Jacob, who had a very inauspicious beginning, but a fine finish. He finished as a worshipper – worshipping upon the top of his staff. What grander finish could you have than that? You will note, however, that some Old Testament characters are conspicuous by their absence in that chapter. Take a man like Solomon; he had a wonderful beginning. He prayed that he might be given wisdom to judge God's so great a people. He was but a little child, he confessed, and we read that God was pleased with his prayer because he had not asked for

riches or glory, and God gave him these blessings in addition to the wisdom for which he had asked, but what about his end? Alas, we have to confess that it was displeasing to God. At the end of his days he became an idolater, forsaking the living and the true God, and so he is not found in the roll of honour recorded in Hebrews 11.

I would encourage every one to consider the end and to be exercised that the rest of our time should be filled out for the pleasure of the blessed God and that when the moment comes for us to go, if it be by way of death, we might, like Stephen, be able to commit our spirits to the Lord. I remember Mr. Taylor saying what a lovely spirit Stephen could hand over to the Lord at the end of his course. The important question for each one of us, is to take heed to our spirits. Twice over in Malachi you have the word, "Take heed to your spirit", Mal. 2:15,16. A lot depends on the way we rule our spirits, and whether we are prepared to go, as Stephen did, forgiving our very murderers.

So much for our own end; I wish finally to speak of the great ultimate thought that is before God. 1 Corinthians 15 verses 24 to 28 is perhaps one of the most remarkable passages in the Scriptures in that the Spirit of God gives us a very large and very long view of what will obtain at the ultimate end, "Then the end, when He gives up the kingdom to Him who is God and Father; when He shall have annulled all rule and all authority and all power. For he must reign until he put all enemies under his feet". It might help if I were to put divine Persons Themselves in the place of the pronouns that are used, beginning for instance with verse 27. "For he" – that is God – "has put all things in subjection under his" – that is Christ's – "feet".

The time is coming when God will bring everything into subjection to Christ. He is going to be honoured in the very scene where He was cast out. Then it goes on to say, "But when he" – that is God – "says that all things are put in subjection, it is evident that it is except him" – that is God – "who put all things in subjection to Him" – that is Christ – "But when all things shall have been brought into subjection to Him" – that is Christ – "then the Son also himself shall be placed in subjection to him" – that is God – "that God may be all in all". I

think it helps us to see which divine Person is in mind in those verses.

Another thing I would like to bring out before I finish, is this, that the passage indirectly suggests a fresh glory attaching to the Person of Christ. After a glorious reign of a thousand years and after exercising universal sway, that blessed Person is prepared to hand the kingdom over to God. He is prepared to surrender it all. What other man would be prepared to take that course? Well, it only shows that the heart of Christ is just the same as it was in the days of His humiliation when it was ever His mind to go down. This was the subject, lowly mind of Jesus, and if He is again prepared to go that way and after a glorious millennial reign of thousand years to yield up the kingdom and the sceptre to God, it ought to encourage us to go down ourselves. There is far more pride in our natural make-up than we realise and it is only as we possess the mind of Christ Jesus – the One who was prepared to go down – that we shall be enabled to take the same path ourselves. All this is to the end that God might be “all in all”. I would not presume to be able to expound that simple and yet profound statement, but it brings before us God in His eternal supremacy, the One who is God from everlasting to everlasting. I suppose this is one of the passages that would embrace the three Persons of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – while however God will be “all in all”, the Lord Jesus Himself for ever remains Man, for the incarnation is never undone. He will ever remain a Man in the presence of God, and we shall be like Him and conformed to His image.

What a glorious end is that to which we all have to look forward! As Mr. Darby said to an anxious clergyman in 1881, when he was exercised about leaving the Church of England, and was filled with misgivings as to the future, ‘There is no future but *glory* for the Christian’. Let us lay that to heart, dear brethren, no future but *glory* for the Christian. Mr. Darby also used similar language to a young man who had sinned and been restored – saying to him at the end of an address, ‘no yesterday but the cross – no tomorrow but the glory. Go on!’ I would, in all affection, pass on that exhortation to

you, dear brethren, that we may be concerned not only for the beginning and for the middle part of the course, but the *finish*.

May God graciously bless this word to all our hearts.

WIMBLEDON

28 June 1952

Ministry recalled at a Golden Wedding (E.C and E.V H.)

[In those days, there was a ministry meeting with a number of hymns and prayers, followed by tea and an address by an invited brother. Ed.]