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FEATURES FOR PRIESTLY DEVELOPMENT

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

THE WORD OF GOD

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FEATURES FOR PRIESTLY DEVELOPMENT

Doug Welch

John 6: 41, 42, 48-50, 60-63; 7: 17, 28; Luke 10: 38-42; John 20: 1-3, 10-11 (to "... without"), 15-19

Beloved brethren we have had a happy time today. I would like this address to merge with some thoughts we have had during the meetings.

What has been on one's mind for weeks is the scripture in 1 Timothy 2 "Our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (v.4). This is an expression of divine desire. Maybe we do not think of it enough that way; God has this desire and expresses it in scripture for us to think about. We have been speaking about the fundamentals of the truth, very great and profound, and the fundamentals come from God. Our brother said the fundamentals are not a matter of man's thinking.

These great and profound things come from God to us. Remember the beginning of Acts where, as gathered together they spoke the great things of God because the Spirit had come to where they were. Their speaking was the result of His incoming. We too have been speaking over great things, and the intent is to be in correspondence with God's thoughts, His desire. How is it done? What is required?

If we are to continue it will be by keeping the word of His patience, by keeping His word and not denying His name. Surely then that would be an exercise of all in this room. If so, we arrive at the most important aspect of our existence as Christians here and that is to maintain the testimony. That is not found with the evangelist, although a testimony of one seeking souls is seen, wonderful in its place and something we could all take up with more committal; but the testimony can only be found in the assembly. No, it does not lie with the evangelist, the testimony is in the assembly. If so, how are we going to fit into this wonderful Christian community we have been considering? The idea of community is to have a place to live in, something to do, have something to contribute; considerations that mean that I can no longer find my living in relation to the world. I

may have once had a place there, where self was the centre, where the system as built by the devil was arranged with self being prominent, but a change came in upon conversion, a divine work began in our souls as sovereign love laid hold of us, but why? It is to come into the gain of these great things that we have been reviewing, and to get impressions for ourselves as the word comes into the meetings (we are to come to the knowledge of the truth). It includes our households too, as young and old merge into the heart of the assembly to contribute something. It is wonderful, this vessel of ministry, praise, administration and testimony, and it is worth living in now, here on earth; a new place to live where eternal life conditions are in contrast with the scene of moral death. We are to be finished with one scene in view of living in another and do it on the basis of righteousness; “the Spirit of life on account of righteousness”, Rom. 8: 10. It is where we learn the mind of the Spirit which is life and peace. We merge into this great vessel before the eye of God where great things proceed. To be in the gain of it, we are to find our life before Him, One who is greater than everything, greater than the universe. Divine Persons dwell together in love; they always have, but have made themselves known. The fulness of that waited in the divine mind until our day; all began with the incoming of Christ, followed by the incoming of the Spirit, and the great things include the excellent glory, the fulness of the present economy and the revelation of God in Christ. We thus baptise to the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These are great things. So what am I to do, how am I to fit in? Romans 12 helps as we considered in the reading. Other bodies here go on in relation to the world but there is one body in Christ that goes on in relation to another world. That is what we belong to, that is where we fit in, we find our place there in that community and contribute to it, the one body in Christ. The exercise is to develop in relation to all these great things.

The four portions read relate to the development of a priest; the priesthood is really in mind for great things cannot continue nor can we enjoy them without a priestly character being developed.

Things will go through as we consider for God in that which belongs to God. We are to have our part in that continuance and consideration. It is not optional. We have been laid hold of for this; a divine work was begun with us and the intent is for us to come into correspondence so that that work can be manifested. We see even in Job's history the intent and result, a priest was developed. He was wrongly criticised and accused; persons thought to be his friends took Job judicially, saying surely there is something wrong with what Job has been doing! How does it end? Job prays for his accusers because he finally arrived at something in his soul. What he had thought was his righteousness was not at all; he puts his hand over his mouth and begins to accept things from God; he was taken up for our learning to suggest to us another order of things and another kind of manhood. A new kind of life and of man emerges, and he becomes a priest. Beloved young persons, you may want things to be made simple and say, How am I to enter into all this?

Let us get help together as considering these four portions of scripture with the intent in them to exercise us as to the development of priests. The scriptures are as much for you as for me.

The first thing here in John 6 is *discrimination*; we have to learn to discriminate firstly as to our food. We have been taken up for life in Christ, and we shall be conformed to the image of Christ in glory. That will be accomplished, but we are to learn that there is no life now outside of Christ – “in Christ Jesus” – no blessing outside Christ, and it is a wonderful, fixed, secure position for us. Thus we learn that our food now is Christ Himself, the bread of life. Not exactly the manna in these verses, although that heavenly grace seen in Him is an aspect of food needed too, that ‘patient life to calm the soul’. We go in for heavenly food, Himself, and we behold His glory, draw everything from Him. He is the bread of life; it is because of His living that we live in this wonderful system, a wonderful living system, and the Spirit of the living God is there. We discriminate as to what we take in to sustain us, and we learn to appropriate Him as food. He has come within our range as Son of Man for our appropriation, coming in at incarnation. A blessed matter that He

came into the scene of testimony; divine love was brought into the scene of death. Eating His flesh and drinking His blood – His death – is in view of another life, delivered from everything here that holds us because now, there is another kind of manhood, and we are to have part with Him where He is. As feeding on Christ, the food of life, we are able to discriminate as to everything else not in keeping with that kind of food, and able to judge everything that hinders us. As we read in verses 60-63, persons could not relate to what was spiritual; they thought along natural lines. We have to know Who is before us and discriminate related to what is spiritual as Peter did at the end of the chapter. This going away affected the Lord; some who were called His disciples went away back because they did not understand what food was or the Person who was their food; they could not take in what was spiritual. We spoke in the reading of the gates of Hades not prevailing against the assembly. It is not going to happen because what is living comes to light in priestly persons; the work of God comes to light and the devil is not going to overcome that! He cannot extinguish what is living or the concept in the divine mind because persons have part, however many or few, and the assembly goes through; we support it by heavenly food. What came down out of heaven and has gone into heaven (v.62) is what we live on. Thus that character, what is heavenly, abides.

“It is the Spirit which quickens, the flesh profits nothing”. We draw on nothing else than the Head and the Centre of God’s universe, the rock of our confession, our stability because our feet are founded upon the rock; “To whom coming, a living stone”, 1 Peter 2: 4. It says in that portion, “if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good” (v.3); every believer does that but coming to the living stone is a further exercise and involves discrimination for stability in testimony; and in view of continuing and with a deeper sense of His preciousness. We are to get a sense of what is precious to Christ too, and what is precious to God, coming out now. In Leviticus 24 there is mention of wheat, flour and the bread of remembrance (v.7); something of Christ is coming into the type and that is to come out now here. Christ is our life, and that is what John 6 is about, and the

necessity to appropriate Him as food, and in that way we discriminate and develop in a priestly way.

Presenting these thoughts together (and again referring to Romans 12), John 7 was read. “Presenting your bodies a living sacrifice”, Rom 12: 1, we are to prove what is the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (v.2). This is by fitting in, finding our place in the body. We spoke together of works, something found in Sardis, although it was characterised as dead yet they were to strengthen things about to die, fundamentals but linked with the power of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in charge not man; that is a fundamental truth. Affection for Christ sustains us as we feed on Him, but the affection is to include what the assembly is to Him. He delivered Himself up for it an act of devotion and love. Yes, these things are fundamental and we are to have them in our minds as the will of God requiring the presentation of our bodies begins to open up to us. A few years ago I belonged to many different groups in Christendom but was not intelligent as to the one body in Christ and the food was not suitable for that intelligence. What about belonging to the one body in Christ? I did not think about that – it is not really known. It is a great matter then, to come to the living stone, as associated with Him during His rejection and to take one’s place through discriminating exercises in the one body in Christ. The Lord says here, “If any one desire to practice his will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is of God, or that I speak from myself”. We learn to discriminate by taking proper food, but then there is a burning *desire* developed with us; this too is a work of God coming out and this desire leads us further into the will of God. Men speak of themselves, the Lord Jesus was here as One who lived by every word that proceeded out through God’s mouth. He did all things to please Him, and this is the kind of life we are feeding upon; it is the kind of life we have. If God has taken us up for life in Christ, and He has, He is going to conform us to the image of His Son in glory – and He will – then we want to come in for that now through desire for it. Desire is an evident and important feature of priesthood; desire for the will of God. There is something coming out

in the Lord's words in this verse which I link with the impression of Philadelphia, where works are not incomplete as in Sardis, and it is where the Lord presents Himself to the saints in that assembly as the holy, the true, priestly appeal (see Rev 3: 7). That Philadelphia state is sustained by persons of priestly character who are in the gain of the way He presents Himself as the holy, the true, who are active there. The Lord further says, "He that seeks the glory of him that has sent him, he is true, and unrighteousness is not in him".

These things are to come to light in our priestly activities, Philadelphian-like persons whose works are complete because of their priestliness. So (as reference was made in one of the readings), if someone comes and sits outside a meeting room, the person sees happy people going up; persons set in life in the one body in Christ; maybe not specifically observed in service just yet, but observed in movement as knowing where their place is in life and observed as persons seeking the glory of Him; the very reason they come up to meeting. Why do you come to the meeting? We come to the meeting because of the Lord Jesus. Our desire for Him is involved and "he that seeks the glory of him that has sent him, he is true, and unrighteousness is not in him", wonderful characteristics coming out in such persons!

We have had discrimination and desire as features for developing as priest and I would like to present to the brethren this further idea of *determination*. If you want to know how to exist, how to fit in, what to do and how to understand, determination is required. Mr Darby says:

Low at thy feet Lord Jesus,
This is the place for me.
There I have learned deep lessons,
Truth that has set me free.

As the Lord said, "the truth shall set you free". Where are we going to get it? Where are you going to learn it? The verses read in Luke 10 show us. To be engaged in these great things, to find our place in the body and to begin to take in truth, to understand, to contribute to the one body in Christ, which is the divine mind for us, we must be

determined to get the good part. What do we see here in Mary? We see a restfulness coming out in her and liberty to draw near to the Lord Jesus, never forgetting who He is, unique in His humanity, eternally divine. Determined to sit at His feet, she is esteemed (she chose the good part); He was her teacher, and as subject-minded, she is teachable. She knows who is before her and she is restful; marvellous conditions there and she is fed; on food contrasted with everything else in the scene of death – the food of life for her soul.

Restfulness is there, liberty, life as in touch with this blessed Person, and learning from Him. She would be ready to take His yoke (see Matt. 11), and no doubt she would merge into the assembly at the incoming of the Spirit. She would be a trustworthy person because she has learned from the Master. This feature of priesthood is needed as things continue and we must have the Lord before us.

We have had discrimination, desire, and determination to get things from the Lord; in John 20 it is *devotedness* that comes out in this woman. She was a hopeless case in her previous history; surely we would have to say that about ourselves. Hopeless, undone, and in principle, possessed by seven demons; it was complete – seven – certainly in her, but we would have to say that of ourselves. Without hope, without God, without Christ, without life, without the Spirit, without the brethren. This is interesting because in the devotedness of this woman, what she is feeling is Christ's absence, and that is what every devoted heart would feel, the absence of Christ. We spoke in the reading of the day coming and all believers who have the Spirit see that day; they love His appearing, the Prince of peace, the One who is "Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace", Isa. 9: 6. When He shall bring in peace on the earth everything will be in perfect balance, and that is only to be found now in testimony, in the place you are occupying among your local brethren. The priesthood then, is a necessity for all these things to continue in testimony, persons considering for God, considering for the Lord and the brethren as being in the main line of the truth, the truth as is it in Jesus. That is what Mary of Magdala would learn in her devotedness to Him because she too would be

ready to take up the truth of the assembly; precious, wonderful vessel formed by the Spirit, and she would find her place right there, in that wonderful vessel and as among the community of believers the one body in Christ. But here, in this devoted heart, Mary says something instinctively; she knows not where the Lord is and she says, "They have taken away the Lord" (later in v. 13 it is "my Lord"). Do you feel that way? They have taken away our Lord, but He is risen and has been taken up in glory; He is a living Priest there maintaining you and me for the testimony. Some of these priestly exercises are apparently being worked out in you and me because we had a desire to be here for these meetings. He is the attracting object and we are drawn to Him; something continually draws us to Him. Mary says things with a devoted heart to two prominent disciples; what we are to look for is the Lord and cannot rest until we find Him. The two went to their own homes (for the time being) but she continues to mourn His absence. What a moral ground that is, and she receives a message for His brethren. Everything begins to open up that pertains to Christ and His brethren. She said certain things instinctively in her love for Him, and now gets a manifestation that she can carry to Christ's brethren; she comes in for His personal touch; it is the Lord Himself! She responds to the manifestation with something distinct, unique and original as the footnote shows – a word only used twice in scripture, my Teacher: she is taught through her affection and devotedness to Him. But what is it she learns?

That she is to be in association with Christ's brethren during His absence and contribute to that company, so she immediately is able to deliver something from the Lord to them. The Lord cannot stay away from devoted hearts who have affection for Him. She takes her place where she will be preserved saved in the absence of Christ, and that is among the brethren. "Our Saviour God will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth".

Assembly conditions are seen here, and the disciples are providing the conditions. In the reading we spoke of a great crowd (Acts 11) and it was pointed out they were gathered together, and 'they' were disciples. Perhaps known as disciples first (as taking on the teaching and as those doing the teaching to the crowd), but then

externally they were known as Christians. The disciples to whom the Lord came were behind closed door through fear of the Jews; nothing of flesh and blood or religious claim was going to be allowed into this great vessel to mar and hinder. Each one there, and each one of us as following that pattern, would be in self-judgment; more than confessing sins, although that is necessary. We seek to be those who honour the Lord Jesus, not ourselves; self-judgment does this. Self once had its place in the area of moral death, but now, as coming to the light among the brethren, those attached to Christ in affection and set up subjectively, seen in the feelings of this woman, devoted hearts gather together as waiting for Christ. You cannot stay away, and we will want this experience of true Christianity to continue in us. The footnote to 1 Timothy 2 says the verse (especially coming to the knowledge of the truth) means to possess the truth (v.4). In a sense it is our possession and we possess it as priests, but it belongs to the Giver; we hold everything in relation to Him. My Teacher, my Saviour, but His brethren; think how wonderful all this is, and we have been taken up for it all, and in relationships known and enjoyed in liberty. The Queen of Sheba was taken up with what she saw, and there was no more spirit left in her, especially as she observed the ascent of Solomon and his train, “happy are thy men”, 1 Kings 10: 8.

These four things came before me in relation to this meeting and from the readings too. The priesthood is the way through and that is by discrimination, desire, determination and devotedness as we find our place in the body, considering for God, finding my place of contribution and living among the brethren; we belong to them and we belong to the one body in Christ. That is our place of living as priests, that is where eternal life is going to be enjoyed in its fullest measure; it depends on where we are. John was on the Isle of Patmos and we get a touch of things as he went through the suffering of isolation because of his identification with the rejection of Christ. He would not give up, and what was in mind? The brethren – “I John your brother” – he was an assembly-person and that is

what we want to be, priestly persons, assembly persons. For His Name's sake.

Glasgow

August 2004

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Charles Remmington

Psalm 90: 2-12; Psalm 102: 23-27; Isaiah 53: 10-11 (...satisfied)

You may have noticed that each of these scriptures we have read together speaks of the days. In Psalm 90 David who has recorded this prayer of Moses could speak of the weakness of man when measured against God who is from eternity to eternity, "thou art God". He had a sense of his own weakness. And where we ended it says, "So teach us to number our days". I would like you to think about that, numbering your days. Psalm 102 speaks prophetically of the Lord Jesus, who is speaking to God there, "My God, take me not away in the midst of my days!", divine feeling entering into that. The counterpart to that is what we find in Isaiah 53, prolonged days. I would like you to remember these three things, numbering your days, cutting off in the midst of the days and prolonged days.

I would like to begin with Psalm 90. This is 'A Prayer of Moses, the man of God' – a man who had experience with God and no doubt David as thinking over it would include it in these Psalms as he would feel the weakness and the frailty of man in the presence of God. Sometimes the Lord works with us in that way, He brings to bear upon us the weakness and the frailty of our mortal frame and brings home to bear upon us the mortality, the corruptibility and the frailty of these vessels that we find ourselves in. How wonderful that the believer then has hope! He has a hope that is outside the frame in which we find ourselves, he has the hope of a body of glory to which no such things can be attached. It is immortal and will go right through to the eternal day to which corruptibility cannot be attached. But, as in this scene here, the writer speaks of the fact that God, "hadst formed the earth and the world, even from eternity to eternity thou art God". This is the One who we have to do with in the gospel, the One who is from eternity and to eternity. What human words can we use, what can we say as to this? "Eternity to eternity", we who are so familiar with time, time cannot be attached to eternity. God Himself, the one who inhabits eternity, yet He is the One who has

seen fit in His wisdom to create the sun, the moon, the stars and the earth and with it He has created time, that with which we are so familiar. This is a relatively short space of time. I am not saying there is eternity and then there is time, that is not the thought; it is from eternity to eternity, but we speak of the 'dip into time'. This time in which we are is when God is working out in the hearts and the souls and the lives of persons something which will go right through to the eternal day. How futile and how weak and how paltry are the efforts of man to establish certain things upon this earth. How men make their plans, make their forecasts, how often they turn out to be foolish. The right thing for a believer and the right thing for every one of us, whether believer or not is to go a day at a time. Hence the exhortation here, "teach us to number our days". None of us knows whether today will be our last day; this maybe a very simple and obvious thing to say, but, the day we are living today you will never have again. You will have the memory of it; tomorrow, if the Lord will that you are here you will have the memory of today, but you will never live today again. So, how are you going to live your days? Here the writer is speaking in the light of the fact of God who is "from eternity to eternity", he says, "Thou makes mortal man to return to dust, and sayest, Return, children of men". I spoke of the ambitions and plans of men, their long term forecasts and their planning, how God often comes in and just touches things, turns them to foolishness. How often this happens, maybe with the very article of death; death is no respecter of persons, no respecter of age, but it comes in and interrupts so many plans of persons. It says here, "Thou makest mortal man to return to dust" – think about that – perhaps to those who are younger, it comes as a shock to think that we are dust. God, in the beginning of Genesis "formed Man, dust of the ground" (Gen 2: 7), wonderful creature. We might say the headstone of all creation. He had created the flora and the animal creation, each having its own beauty and God could say it was good. He made the animals and they were good, but he made man which was very good, but formed of the dust. Furthermore sin having come in and Eve having partaken of that fruit of which she was forbidden to take and fallen to the wiles of the devil in questioning

what God had said. Then the solemn word to Adam, “For dust thou art; and unto dust shalt thou return”, Gen 3: 19.

And so it goes on, “For a thousand years, in thy sight, are as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: and in the morning they are like grass that groweth up”; we can read through this Psalm and consider it for ourselves as to where we stand in relation to God for the “wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6: 23). That is the penalty of sin having come in. But the writer goes on, “Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance”. We are having to do with the all seeing, all knowing God, the One who sees us as we are gathered together now, the One who looks right into the very crevices of your heart and who will know just where you are in relation to Him. The One with whom we have to do. It is not a question of ifs or buts, it is the One with whom you have to do.

So, it says here, “Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins” – can you not see the gospel opening up? The conscience working? From one’s own experience perhaps what we do in secret is more of a sinful character than what is done publicly.

Perhaps we are away from the family, away from the brethren, away from who we think to be taking account of us. Are you not conscious of the eye of God upon you? The fear of God would keep us, the fact that God, great as He is, from eternity to eternity, would take account of every action, every deed and every thought and as a sinner you are away from God and you need a Saviour. The glory of the glad tidings is that He has provided a Saviour and provided a way out of this. I raise the challenge here – our days are perhaps three score years and ten, may be four score years, maybe we live to seventy, maybe through reason of strength we live to eighty. It says here, “So teach us to number our days, that we may acquire a wise heart”. Perhaps the Lord is teaching us something. I believe the Lord is teaching us something, making us realise we are not perhaps as strong as we think we are. It does not take too long in our lives before we realise our weakness, so “teach us to number

our days". Maybe the Lord would take different ways of doing that with each one of us.

The glorious subject of the glad tidings is the Person of the Lord Jesus, the One whom He has established as heir of all, whose Name has been established by which there is life and by which there is power and by which there is forgiveness of sins. It meant that the Lord Jesus had to come here, to take up a body and a condition here in which He could taste death. Think of who He was in His greatness and His glory, One who did not consider it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God. Think of the humbling that entered into the Lord Jesus coming here as being found as that lowly babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. Think of the pathway which the Lord Jesus took from babyhood, to childhood, to a young boy, through all the various stages of life, commencing His public life at about thirty years of age when the Spirit would descend upon Him. I would like us just to pause and consider afresh of those days of the Lord Jesus – perfect, undefiled, separated from sin – One who as here was ever moving fully in the will of God. It was His pleasure to do the will of God. Hebrews speaks of that, "Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up both supplications and entreaties to him who was able to save him out of death, with strong crying and tears; and having been heard because of his piety; though he were Son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered", Heb. 5: 7.

What can one say as to that? "He learned obedience from the things which he suffered". Every day was absolutely perfect, not a thought, not an action, not a movement would be apart from the will of the Father. That is wonderful to contemplate. Read John's gospel and you can see the days of the Lord Jesus, take account of the number of days which are referred to at the time of the death of Lazarus, he "remained two days where he was" (John 11: 6), then "six days before the Passover", John 12: 1. The gospel commences early on with the first day, the second day and the third day, but every day was a pleasure to the eyes of heaven. Yet He came into this condition to lay it down, for He was to actually die. I speak for myself, we perhaps speak somewhat lightly in the gospel of the fact

that the Lord Jesus died. But I would like afresh this afternoon to think of the immensity and the greatness of it. The One who had the right to live and yet He laid down His life in death. He was actually numbered amongst the dead. The reality of that came into the soul of the Lord Jesus in deep feeling. Remember the way in which He could speak, "now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour", John 12: 27. Remember too in Gethsemane as being given the cup of the Father which He had to drink He could beg of the Father, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me, but not as I will but as thou wilt", Matt. 26: 39. Remember too, His standing on the mount with the three disciples, Peter John and James, one account tells us what Moses and Elias were speaking to Him about. Moses and Elias appearing in glory spoke of His departure which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (see Luke 9: 31). A conversation in heavenly places, but all this was a reality to the Lord Jesus as He went on and came down to face the very article of death itself, as it says prophetically here, "He weakened my strength in the way, he shortened my days. I said, My God take me not away in the midst of my days!" Divine feelings entering into that. At about thirty three and a half years how His life could be shortened, not even that of the three score years and ten, but His life was shortened and He laid His life down as a righteous.

Think of the way in which the Lord Jesus could be hung upon a cross. Take a view of Him there, see Him there on that hill outside of Jerusalem suffering the common horrible death of a crucifixion.

Either side of Him were malefactors, robbers, thieves, those who were justly there; the Lord Jesus having already borne the suffering at the hand of man was there to be lifted up. There He was as lifted up, become the spectacle of man who ridiculed, those passing by said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save", Matt 27: 42. One of the thieves himself ridiculing the Lord Jesus Himself. Think of that word of the other, "we indeed justly ... but this man has done nothing amiss", Luke 23: 41. There hanging upon that cross the One who had His life shortened, had His steps weakened on account of what He undertook for you and for me. He was there suffering, the

suffering for me. I can say, thank God for that. He bore my sins in His body on that tree. Can you say that? Can you look up to heaven now, the opened heavens, and see every sin that you have committed, those secret sins, those public sins, those thoughts, all those actions that you have done, and can you say, Yes, Jesus bore every one of those sins and the way is clear? You say, how can that be, what is the witness of it? Give me the witness of that. The testimony and the witness of it was that that blood was shed – the soldier in cruelty pierced His side and forthwith came out blood and water. What a wonderful thing that was! That blood was for God, “when I see the blood, I shall pass over you”. That is your surety, that is your cover if you put your faith and trust in that finished work of Jesus and what He has done to the satisfaction of God for time and for eternity, you know that all is clear. Your conscience is clear, the way is open before God, you can go in, the veil of the temple is rent, and God is now ready to impart blessings upon you to give you the peace and joy alone can be found as confessing with your mouth.

I have spoken of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, His life being shortened, His days being shortened but it says in Isaiah, “Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath subjected him to suffering. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin” – “shalt make his soul an offering for sin”, there are feelings entering into this. One thing I can say this afternoon, whilst the preacher may try to convey something of the feelings of God, however inadequately, the whole divine system is towards you in deep affections and that has been expressed in making His soul an offering for sin. Think of all those offerings that have been before in those Old Testament times, how much blood had been shed and all those offerings that are piled upon those altars but there was never a time like it when the Lord Jesus offered Himself up as the righteous offering, as the sinless One that you and I, the sinners, might go free, the just for the unjust. “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see a seed, he shall prolong his days” – is this not wonderful? His days on earth were shortened, here His days are prolonged, where is He

now? He is living! He is living at the right hand of God and is living eternally. He is there for you now as we speak. He has been into the grave, He knew what it was to die, He knew what it was to commit His spirit into the hand of the Father, He knew the paradise.

These are very deep and holy subjects. He was placed in that grave, went through all this for us, but think of the delight of the Father coming to that grave and raising the Lord Jesus. The stone was rolled away and the victory of it! It says an angel sat on it, and there, what do we see? An empty grave! The Father had been there before, He had been to that grave and raised the Lord Jesus; such was His delight and such was His pleasure in the work of the Lord Jesus He could raise Him so that He could be seen and handled, but then to be taken up and ascended at the right hand of God, never more to have to say to the question of sin. That has been settled once and for all. He will come back again to take up His rights and to reign, and blessed be His Name we shall be with Him too, we shall reign with Him. That is the hope of every believer, but "he shall see a seed, he shall prolong his days". This is the counterpart to Psalm 102, shortened of days but now prolonged of days and "he shall see a seed". The Lord perhaps saw that seed in the disciples, saw that in the beginning, saw the twelve disciples and what will flow out of those disciples, the early apostles, the early Christians and here we are now nearly two thousand years on, many many days have entered into that. "He shall see a seed", He saw something that was going to be planted and something that would grow into something like Himself, it will grow into a new order, something that He would look upon and take pleasure in. Looking round this room this afternoon, I think we can see something of that seed, that which is going to give Him pleasure eternally and is going to prolong His days. I think He saw that seed in the thief, the one who got the blessing, the one who went to paradise with Jesus, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise", Luke 23: 43. How quickly the work of God works, instantaneously almost there, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise", there was a seed sown and there was something that was of pleasure for the heart of the Lord Jesus even

in that dark hour in the confession of that thief. Think of what the Lord found even in one like a thief.

I read recently a preaching, in which the preacher was speaking of the Lord Jesus. He said, He lost a thief in Judas, but gained a thief on the cross. That thief on the cross had some appreciation of the glory of the One who was there; it seemed as though Judas did not. I believe the thief on the cross meant much to the heart of the Lord Jesus, all part of His seed. He shall be with the Lord Jesus, he will be raised, he will be given a body of glory. But it says, "he shall prolong his days", right through to the eternal day when there will be myriads secured in this time scene for Him and they will come out in display and will be there for the eternal worship of God, "he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand".

That is a wonderful thing to think about; the pathway of the Lord Jesus constantly yielded pleasure to the eyes of heaven. I wonder what your days yield by way of pleasure to divine Persons?

Are you in the hand of the Lord Jesus? That is where you yield pleasure. It says, "and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand", it will be so in the millennial day, everything will be under the hand of the Lord Jesus, it will be so and there will unprecedented prosperity upon this earth of a material kind. What we are concerned about now in the gospel preaching is not your material prosperity. God may bless you a little according to your material prosperity, that may be so; it is no sign exactly of God's favour towards you, but what we are concerned about is your soul prosperity and you gain that and keep that by keeping in His hand.

Keep in His hand, keep in a sense of being in the hand of the Lord Jesus, be near Him, have communion with Him, have the same growing appreciation of what He has done, and where He is now.

Where He is now there are prolonged days. I believe that if we do not have some appreciation of where He is in the glory now we are in danger of slipping back into the world from which we were saved.

We need that living link. We need to be kept in the sense of being in the hand of the Lord Jesus. It is a bit like what John says as

writing to Gaius, "I desire that in all things thou shouldest prosper and be in health" but he would wish that his soul prospered, "even as thy soul prospers" (3 John 2). That would be the wish of every godly minded person this afternoon, He would wish that you would prosper in your soul. What we deal with here in the gospel this afternoon is not material prosperity, far be it, it is far beyond that; it is what is of a spiritual lasting eternal value. That is what we grapple with, that is what we are seeking, just to imbibe something and trust that the Lord and the Spirit will take of it and work and use it and it will come out in these prolonged days. These thoughts are very simple, but I trust that the Lord will use them for the forming of our thoughts, He perhaps might just raise the question, "teach us to number our days", because I believe the Lord is teaching us, He is saying something to us and He is speaking to us very loudly, whether it be young or whether it be old, "teach us to number our days". None of us know how many more days are left for us. The Lord is coming for us, that is the hope and expectation of every believer in which we will be raptured, we will be given our bodies of glory. Maybe if the Lord sees fit, He might take to Himself any one of us through death, but even then, how much better it is to be with Jesus. It is better. The hope of the believer is so great compared to the poor things of this world that we can go through this scene as victorious, but nevertheless exercised, deeply exercised persons. Keep yourself in the hand of the Lord Jesus, there you will find soul prosperity. May the Lord bless the word.

Colchester

10 October 2004

THE WORD OF GOD

Arne Finger

John 17: 14

I had in mind with the help of the Lord to speak about the word. This thought has occupied me for a long time and I have more scriptures in mind to refer to as we go along.

We know that 'the Word' is our Lord Jesus Christ but if you read the Bible we find the word from the beginning until the end.

There are so many references about the word that it is not possible to follow them all, so we have the scriptures in order that we may read it all our lives.

I would like to start with a scripture, the first reference to the word as we speak it, say it or hear it. It can be heard, it can be read, and it can be spoken. The word is something very important, the most important is the word of God, but then the words we utter are very important as well. We have to be very careful as to what we say and what we do. The first way of speaking we find is in Genesis 1 where we see that 'God said'. God speaks. That is an ability just the Creator God has. If we say something it does not do anything, but God, and God here is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, because it says, "let us make" (v.26), but when He speaks He can create. If I want to create anything, I have to use tools, but God can speak and when He speaks things come into existence. By this we understand how the whole world was made. It was not made by things coming out of the unseen, or evolving, the world came into existence by the word of God. The world and everything we see is held by the power of the word.

The first time Jehovah speaks in a vision to Abram it says, "After these things the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision" (Gen. 15: 1), that is the word could come to us in a vision. We might have a vision in a dream or during the day time; it might not be always a dream, sometimes we use the phrase impression, but an impression might be a vision. Here we see that Jehovah speaks in a

vision to Abram. The first thing He says is to comfort him, "Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward". Abram had to learn and he believed the word. The word is to be believed. The first thing Satan did was to put doubt into the word of God; he says, "Is it even so, that God has said", Gen. 3: 1. Was it really God's word? Was it the thought of *the word*? Such questions exist until today, and I think we have to be very careful of doubting anything that we find in this precious book. This book is inspired by the Holy Spirit and if I do not understand it I should not doubt it. I can meditate and ask the Holy Spirit to make me able to understand it – it might take, forty, fifty years until I understand one verse. I have had some questions for many years and I have asked brethren for an answer and up until now I was not really satisfied, but it does not make me doubtful, it might be that I am very stubborn.

In Deuteronomy there is a scripture which the Lord uses, He says, "but by everything that goeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live" (8: 3); it says before "man doth not live by bread alone". It is a very important scripture which some thousand years later the Lord Jesus Himself used when He was attacked by Satan, when He was in the temptation of Satan. It is very remarkable there that the Lord Jesus always quoted scripture. He never quoted anything else but the scripture. He says three times, "It is written" (Luke 4: 4) and after that Satan had to go away. It is very important that we read the scriptures and that is my appeal to everyone, even though I know that all of you will read the Bible all the time, but I would like to encourage you to keep on reading the scriptures. This is one book and yet it is many books. It is one book that we hold in our hand but actually it is a complete library, it is sixty six books. These sixty six books work together with thousands of cross references and it makes it into one. There is no book in this world which is so well laid out and so precious than the Holy Bible.

God speaks to Moses and others in the law. There was a law for the kings, what the kings should do. It says in Deuteronomy 17 if you will set up a king this is that what the king should do. "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he

shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites; and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear Jehovah his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them” (17: 18,19). Here we find a commandment to read the book.

We know that when we believe we are made kings and priests; here is a law to the kings to read and to meditate all the days of their life as to the word of God. We can thank God that we have these Bibles. We might have several in our house and they are there to be used. But the letter kills, but the Spirit quickens – so it is very important that we believe and that we rely on the Holy Spirit who will help us to make these words live for us. The Lord says in John 6, “The words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life” (v.63). All the words that the Lord Jesus has spoken are spirit and life and we find more of what the word is.

In Deuteronomy 31 we have that the law should be read before all Israel, “thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their ears. Gather the people together, the men, and the women, and the children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear Jehovah your God, and take heed to do all the words of this law; and that their children who do not know it may hear it and learn” (vv.11-13). Here it goes a bit further.

It is a responsibility for the parents, which has been an exercise for me having children myself, to teach them in the things of the precious word. It is not that we just read it. I might read it and keep it for myself, but we have to read it to all men, “that they may hear”.

If you do not read it, they cannot hear it. Further on we see that Joshua keeps this. When they came into the land we find that he built an altar and he wrote everything on stones, “Then Joshua built an altar to Jehovah to the God of Israel ...an altar of whole stones, over which iron had not been lifted up. And they offered up burnt-offerings on it to Jehovah, and sacrificed peace-offerings. And he wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written before the children of Israel” (Josh. 8: 30-32). There was respect for the word of God and Joshua did what should have been

done. He wrote all these words on these stones. It would take quite a while to copy a Bible. It is again something that Satan attacks.

We speak about the Bible and you speak about it to other men.

They say, this book has been passed on and passed on and there have been copy errors in it, but have you ever tried to copy a chapter? Take a pen and write down one complete chapter, it takes roughly forty minutes to do so; if you wish to copy the whole Bible it will take you about three and a half years if you do one chapter a day! If you did this you would not dare to make a mistake, there have been no mistakes. There are so many who have studied these scripts, the actual original manuscripts are not existing, but when other scriptures and Bibles are found they see that it has been copied to perfection. Joshua writes on these stones and afterwards he does not just write them on the stone but he says to the people go and read them, but afterwards Joshua “read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua read not before the whole congregation of Israel, and the women, and the children, and the strangers that lived among them” (vv. 34,35). Every word is important and every word is important to be said and to be told. It says here, “the blessing and the curse”. The word of God is sometimes very frightening, the word of God is like a two-edged sword. It is not ‘a wellness Gospel’ that everyone feels well and you do not dare to speak about hell, because the people might get frightened by it. I have heard brethren saying that you do not preach judgment. I do not totally agree with that. There is a heaven and there is a hell. If we preach the gospel we have to say that people get saved, but they must know from what they are saved, otherwise I wonder how these people who say we should not speak of these things would read the scripture in Matthew 25, “And these shall go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into life eternal” (v.46). For whom is this scripture meant? It is meant for all men. We cannot just scrub out a bit of the Bible and say we do not speak about this, people might feel uncomfortable. If the sinner is not saved he should feel uncomfortable, he should feel uncomfortable until he is saved, saved

for time and eternity. The word of God is serious, something which is very serious, not something which we make fun of, it should guide us all our lives and even as a believer if you read the whole Bible, sometimes you come into deep soul exercises. The word of God is sometimes very serious, but then the word of God is very glorious and we find the most heavenly thoughts there which help us to live a life down here where we are hated. The scripture says that the world hates us because of the word which we keep. We do keep the word until the Lord Jesus comes. It does not matter what happens to us, we keep the word, and we believe it. We should not let things which are not from God come into our ministry. I like to read about creation and evolution, it is a good way to start a conversation with a non-believer. In Christianity the thought of the 'gap theory' has crept in. They say, in Genesis 1 between verses 1, 2 and 3 there might have been a long period and the gap theory says that in these times the dinosaurs and fossils which we find now have lived, but that cannot be true, because that would mean that death had been there before the fall into sin, for the result of sin is death, and death came in through Adam and Eve. There was no death before, so this is not a true theory. The next is that God says, He made heaven and earth in six days and not in six days as a thousand years, in six days with twenty four hours. I believe that and I think that is the truth.

There are two very interesting kings in scripture, the first and probably the last good king was Josiah. Josiah was very young when he became king, just eight years old, "And Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of Jehovah", 2 Kings 22: 8. I was recently with a customer and spoke of several things, and then we came to speak about faith, and they remembered that they had a Bible; the wife went to find a very old Bible which had hardly been read – they found the book but they had not read it. In 2 Kings they find the book and read it and they got a fright. They came to the king, "And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass when the king heard the words of the book of the law that he rent his garments" (v.10), he was concerned as to the words of the book which had been found. He

read the book. It might have been that they had come to the ten commandments and the first commandment was that he should not have any idols, should not bow down before them, should not worship them, that there is just one God and you should follow Him.

He got a fright, because there were idols everywhere at the time when he was king. Then he kept on reading, and he might have come to the law of the kings and got another fright because God said he should read it all the days of his life. There the word of God was like a two-edged sword poking into Josiah's heart. He did the right thing, he took all the idols, all the wrong altars and all these things which were idolatry and he crushed them into dust and smashed them into bits and pieces, he burnt them and got the land free of all the things which hindered the serving of God. He put them in the torrent of Kidron – an interesting part on the east side of Jerusalem – this torrent of Kidron is mentioned several times. When David had to flee from Absalom, he went bare foot through the torrent of Kidron on the mount of Olives, and we find our Lord Jesus Christ going the same way, there where all the sins were before everything which hinders living a life with God. God blessed Josiah and there was great joy.

We find in the times of Nehemiah when they were rebuilding the city walls that when they had finished they had a scribe called Ezra. It says of him that he “stood upon a high stage of wood” (Neh 8: 4). We see that the people of Israel had absolute respect of the word of God. It says, “And he read in it before the open place that was before the water-gate from the morning until midday, in presence of the men and the women, and those that could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law” (vv. 3,4) and it goes on to say, “And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up” (v.5). They had total respect for the word of God, they stood up, stayed in their place, listened to the word of God. It was not laid out yet, just a plain text, the word sometimes speaks for itself. Then there were certain other people next to Ezra and they, “caused the people to

understand the law; and the people stood in their place. And they read in the law of God distinctly out of the book, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (v.8) – we find here that there was respect for the word of God and that they read it, that is something which is very good. You will always find that if there is a recovery, that they read the book, it was very important.

Another interesting story is in Jeremiah 36 – God speaks to Jeremiah and says to him, "Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee" (v.2); Jeremiah dictates to Baruch, the writer, all that he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Baruch wrote it down. Jeremiah then told Baruch to go to the king's house and read what he had written down. The king was Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah – the people were frightened by the word which Baruch read. In the end the reading came before the king, around him were all the princes, all the scribes and priests.

and they were sitting in their winter house. Jehudi read the roll to the king, "And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four columns, he cut with the scribe's knife, and cast it into the fire that was in the pan until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was in the pan" (v.23). Here we find Satan destroying the word of God.

Satan surrounded by religious people, all these people who are in religious powers, it says, "they were not afraid, nor rent their garments" (v.24), as Josiah did. There were three people who made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll, but he would not listen to them. There we find the total attack of Satan. They read the roll and said that it is not right, they were not even frightened, they were totally cold towards the word of God, filled with Satan. Could that destroy the word of God? No! Jehovah speaks again to Jeremiah and says to him, "Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned" (v.28). The words were repeated again and it says, that words were added to the first words, the word of God cannot be bound. They can bind men, they could put Paul into prison and so on. Paul says, "the word of God is not bound" 2 Tim 2: 9. The word of God is eternal. The Lord Jesus

says, "The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall in no wise pass away", Matt 24: 35. It was not the first time something was rewritten. Think of Moses when he had the two stone tables and the law written on them, he came down from the mountain and saw all the evil of the people of Israel and he smashed the tables on the floor. God says to him, go and write it again. Some thousands of years later we still have these wonderful words. We see that Satan is always attacking these wonderful words.

I would like to say something as to our Lord Jesus Christ being the Word Himself. We find in John 1 the precious words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. *He* was in the beginning with God. All things received being through him, and without him not one thing received being which has received being" (v. 1). When I was young I often thought that Jesus was just there when He was born and that He never existed before, but Jesus is eternal, He was always there. He became flesh and He was called the Son of God, but He was there from all eternity. He must have been because He is the Creator, He created everything, Jesus Christ our Lord. Is it not wonderful that we have to do with such a powerful Lord? Nothing came into existence without Him, He created all things. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us and we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father, full of grace and truth" (v.14). What a wonderful Person! Here is Jesus being a Man like you and me (always far from sin). He Himself who was God has emptied Himself and come down and become man for you and for me. He was really Man and He was God, He was the Word, and it is not that He said, I am the Son of God, but He testified that He was the Son of God. He testified it by doing wonders. Wonders are things which we cannot imitate. For example, if someone is blind and you make him see, that is a wonder, the doctors cannot do that. If Jesus walks on water that is a wonder, gravity would not allow us to do that, but He holds everything through the might of His word. Every atom, every molecule is held by His word. If He were to let the word go everything would disappear. Every one of us who lives, lives

through the word of God whether you are a believer or not. Life comes from God. No one can live without Jesus, He is the life. He is the way, the truth and the life, He is the Word and He keeps everything together by the power of His word. That is Jesus. When He walked over the water He was able to change the laws of nature. The laws of nature would not allow this. You can test the laws of nature all the time and this would not work, but if you believe on Jesus you can triumph. Peter actually walked on the water, he believed. The Lord said, Come, and he went out of the boat and he walked on the water. He believed in the word. If you believe the word we will overcome.

There are other things which the Lord has done. Think of the time in Joshua when he made the moon and the sun stand for one day. That is not physically possible, it is not explainable. The earth turns with a very high speed, if it was to suddenly be stopped, all the water would fly off, the energy which is in everything would not let it work. He must have stopped the earth for one day. This is a wonder! That is what Jesus can do.

The Holy Spirit inspired the word of God; when we read it we can see that the word of God is inspired. We find something very precious in the word that God gives us often very small simple answers. Sometimes He just says one sentence. Many could speak about just one sentence for a long time because there is so much fullness in one simple sentence. I recently came across an article about a man who studies nature. He looked at all the animals and found that animals do not have many problems in giving birth, they do it themselves and do not have problem. If any one of us has been present when a child is being born, it is not easy for humans.

Humans are the only creature who have problems with birth because sin came in and God said that "I will greatly increase thy travail and thy pregnancy; with pain thou shalt bear children" (Gen 3: 16). A very short sentence but full of truth, it is very plain and true and God will not change it because we are fallen man. Even if we believe we still have the same problems, God is absolutely righteous.

Coming to the end of this occasion I would like to encourage every one of us to read daily in the word of God. Bibles are quite cheap today, if you read one, it might take you roughly a year to go through the Bible. You can take a coloured pencil to highlight scriptures. Study the Bible above every other book you have. We have this book, we can read. I do not say you should not read other books, but I think as a believer this is the most precious book that we have. There is the most truth in it. It is a book inspired by the Holy Spirit Himself, by God Himself. It is the Word of God and if you read through it you will come to scriptures at times which fit exactly to the day in which you live, or an experience you have just gone through. There is everything that we need in our life found in the Bible. This is so encouraging.

The word of God is truth, the word of God is life, the Spirit and is everlasting, it never finishes. We should be careful with what we say; in Matthew the Lord says that we will be judged by every word, which we have said. If I think about this I feel very humble, all these words and thoughts I have had in my life makes me feel very humble. Every one will stand before God once and have to hear what we have said and done. It is forgiven, yet we will hear it again. I think then when we enter into glory we will realise the absolute grace of God, that we all, everyone of us there being saved here is absolute grace when we shall be in eternity with Jesus Christ our Lord. That is that we are, saved through grace. We have to believe but we are saved through grace. This book is like a love letter to us. When you are young and you are courting and you get a love letter from a loved one, you cannot wait to read it, you do not put it off.

Today we have mobiles and send texts – if the mobile sends a signal that a text has arrived we leave everything and run to the mobile and read and answer back. This is our text (the Bible), the texting from God to us and it can occupy us our whole lives long.

There is so much in it, whenever you read in it, even those who are quite old still find something new in it, because it is inspired by the Spirit of God who searches the truth of God Himself. There is no end, He will always bring something new, it will never end, even in

eternity. We have nice things and appreciate them for a while, but after a time we get used to them, and they do not mean so much, but in heaven we can never get used to it, it is absolutely eternal, always something new. That is because it is living. Everything we have around us is dead, but we have life in the word of God and let us consider this precious word which is no one else but our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of the living God.

Walton

23rd October 2004