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[PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD](#)

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“THE HOLY THING”

Luke 1: 34-37; 2 Corinthians 6: 17-7: 1; Hebrews 12: 5-14; 2 Peter 3: 11-16

P.M. I wondered if we might get help from the Lord in enquiring together as to the reference in Luke to “the holy thing”. Not exactly the “holy one” (John 6: 69) that Peter speaks of later, but “the holy thing”. It is striking that Luke should bring it in for he writes, I would judge, not having been acquainted with the Lord Jesus in His life here, but he develops in his gospel the conditions into which the Lord Jesus came. He is bringing out exactly the relationships that John brings out, “an only begotten with a father” (ch 1: 14) and the One “who is in the bosom of the Father” (v 18); that is John’s presentation. Luke brings out the pure and holy conditions into which the Lord Jesus came and closes the gospel with those conditions remaining here after his absence. Young people would know that the key to every book of the Bible usually lies in the first few verses and in the last few, it opens it and it shuts it. Luke’s presentation comes that way, there are conditions into which He came. The One who came was Himself intrinsically holy. It could be said of none other. Holiness is formed in the believer, but in Jesus it was not formed, it was there intrinsically. I wondered if we may get help to ponder the “the holy thing” and to see the way in which the character of the testimony of God, came into expression in Jesus and is to continue in holy conditions. It will find its culmination in what has been formed in the holy city that will shine in the day of display.

E.C.B. It seems to me striking that the angel says “the holy thing” when Jesus was coming into a world almost entirely characterised by unholiness, as if God would establish the element of holiness in a Man in such a world.

P.M. I was thinking that. If we read history books, and those that have helped us have touched on these things, the conditions into which the Lord Jesus came could hardly have been more corrupt than they were at that time. The world had a pagan and heathen

character with all that that meant, but into such public conditions came “the holy thing”. As it says in Isaiah, He grew up as a root out of dry ground (see Isa. 53: 2). He derived nothing from those conditions, but He brought into them the display of the holiness of God.

E.C.B. You may well compare that to the present day when unholiness marks virtually everything and those who insist on the work of God are mocked and rejected. Could you just say a word as to what you understand by holiness?

P.M. There have been many definitions of it. Righteousness seems to bear on the claims of the throne of God, holiness stands related to the heart of God and the conditions that are suited to the heart of God and man being in the presence of such a glorious Person.

E.C.B. Righteousness implies the existence of good and evil, but holiness is an element of the manifestation of love and relates to perfection in the condition in which it is. God must always have wanted this. He said of Israel, ye shall be to me a holy people (see Deut 7: 6).

P.M. Yes, He looked for it right from that moment and yet it awaited the incoming of the Lord Jesus for its manifestation, “marked out Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by resurrection of the dead”, Rom 1: 4. There was what was distinctive there that had never been, for the One who came in was intrinsically holy.

E.C. The reference of Mr Darby’s in a note to Hebrews 7 is most valuable as to holiness, ‘This, when applied to God, designates him as holy, knowing good and evil perfectly, and absolutely willing good and no evil. When applied to men, it designates them as separated, set apart to God from evil and from common use’. It really comes to the point that holiness is love.

P.M. And that love coming into expression in the scene where the question of good and evil had to be resolved. Therefore, in Psalm 22 the Lord Jesus as hanging there upon that cross, prophetically, asks the question, “why hast thou forsaken me?” and immediately the answer is, “Thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of

Israel” (vv 1,3). If the holiness of God was to be made known, the moral question had to be met in order that there might be an answer that was in keeping with the love of God.

E.C.B. That really explains the scripture in 2 Corinthians. It is the basis of separation from evil and that is why God forsook Christ on the cross. God Himself is separating Himself from the evil that was there which Christ was bearing. Some of these things relate to the integrity of love.

P.M. I am sure of that. I wondered whether we might just feed our souls on the distinctiveness of what came in in Jesus as “the holy thing”. It is not even here the perfect thing, but “the holy thing”.

A.McS. He not only shrank from evil but He delighted in what was good. Are you carrying that thought through as to holiness and the holy thing, perfect judgment in shrinking from all that was wrong but delighting always in what was good?

P.M. Yes, and living in the enjoyment of that perfect relationship that He had with the Father, into which evil could never enter. Intrinsically He was holy – we must always bear that in mind. You can understand that everything for the Lord Jesus took its character from His relationship with the Father.

D.E.R. The note says this word “born” might be ‘begotten’. Does that not indicate that anything of this nature must come from God Himself?

P.M. Do you think that the references in this section to the Holy Spirit would bear that out? What was here in that blessed Man was of the Holy Spirit, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and power of the Highest overshadow thee”. There would no doubt be a link with the oblation which was mingled with oil. One might say carefully and reverently, there was not one grain or fibre in the humanity of Jesus to which the Holy Spirit did not find His delight in associating Himself.

D.A.B. Do you think that holiness, especially in Jesus, conveys that He abounded in all that He was towards God and towards Man? My

attention was drawn to the passage in 1 Thessalonians which connects holiness with love, "But you, may the Lord make to exceed and abound in love toward one another, and toward all, even as we also towards you, in order to the confirming of your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father" (ch 3: 12,13). I was thinking this was not something that the Father saw glimpses of, but "I do always the things that are pleasing to him", John 8: 29.

There was a bounty about the features which have been drawn attention to in Jesus.

P.M. I am sure that helps and while we must be careful to guard that there was no formation in holiness in Him, yet the intensity of the pressure that came upon Him only brought out for the Father's delight those features which He found so pleasurable.

D.A.B. Attention was drawn to that at the three day meetings recently, the pressure brought out features in Jesus that we might not otherwise have known. It was this feature to the exclusion of everything else. Everything else took its character from it. I was recalling what was brought before us last time as to the burnt-offering. Maybe on our side we are at the very minimum with "two turtle doves or two young pigeons" (Lev 5: 7), but we were being exhorted to aspire to something more, and maybe this enquiry would help us in that to see the absence of measure that there was in Jesus.

P.M. That should help us in our enquiry. The burnt-offering and the other offerings that you have in Leviticus were largely the result of felt need, but the oblation was in type the pouring out of the heart in the appreciation of the One who was infinitely holy and consistently holy through and through.

J.McK. Do you think that the ark as carried in the wilderness covered with a cloth of blue would bear on this? Other items were covered with badgers' skins and goats' skins, but the cloth of blue was distinctive and would be seen instantly. It was as if other items might have needed what was protective, but the ark did not.

P.M. That is food for us to contemplate because the distinctiveness of that humanity stood alone. From that point of view it needed no protection. There was nothing that could defile it. We get defiled so easily, we are moving through a scene of corrupt communications and corrupt literature, corrupt displays, and we may be tainted by it if we are not careful, but there was nothing that could taint Him.

J.McK. Righteousness judges evil, holiness repels it.

P.M. That helps.

D.E.R. God Himself is intrinsically holy. Does the reference to “the holy thing” remind us that this One who was going to be born in humanity was in His Person indeed God Himself?

P.M. God came into His own testimony as “the holy thing”. There had been testimony before – locally we have been reading the history of David; there had been testimony in David’s history but it was not always holy. God came into His own testimony and in that testimony there was nothing but what was holy.

D.E.R. There was an expression of God Himself in His holiness in everything which marked the Lord here.

P.M. Just so, and therefore it says, “the holy thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God”. He had not had that title before. He came into manhood and took on the title of the Son of God, but God was here Himself as “the holy thing”.

E.C.B. Do you think that God felt the necessity of bringing in a Man of this kind? I do not refer to it in relation to our sins, but that God must in the world that He had created have a Man who was intrinsically holy?

P.M. He had waited for this moment to bring Him in that in Him there might be the display of all that was in the heart of God and all that was in keeping with that heart in a Man.

E.C.B. Elements of the tabernacle system have been referred to. Is not everything in the holy place prophetic of Christ?

P.M. This gospel brings it out as much as any. I was thinking of Simeon; he really carried the ark in his affections as he came in.

Then you get the golden altar in chapter 3, the Lord Jesus coming out of the waters of baptism and praying, you have the golden altar (see v 21). Everything looked on to this blessed Person. You get some sense in the giving of the detail of the construction of the tabernacle system to Moses that God was looking on to another Man. Moses says, "A prophet will I raise up unto them from among their brethren, like unto thee" (Deut 18: 18), as if God had given him some sense of it that he was going to bring in One that was the object of His heart.

H.A.H. Does the reference to "the holy thing" bear on all that follows in the gospel. It characterised Him absolutely? I was thinking of how it says in chapter 2, "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature" (v 52). The fact that He was the holy thing would guard from any intrusion of the education that we have to go through.

P.M. You mean what we have to learn morally in our soul exercise? That needs guarding because things are said around us that are not true; but there was no development of holiness in Jesus; it was there and you might say carefully, it was the nature of the One who was here.

H.A.H. I was thinking that – the idea of reducing the blessed Lord to just another man, an ordinary man. This guards against that absolutely.

P.M. This was no ordinary man. The One we are speaking of has come so near and took a bondman's form, but nevertheless He never ceased to be "the holy thing". It makes His atoning work all the more precious to our souls when we think of what was transacted at the cross. He never ceased to be "the holy thing" but He became the sin bearer.

E.C.B. It says, "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us", 2 Cor 5: 21.

P.M. These are expressions we use lightly and I have felt for myself recently the need to ponder on the words of scripture that we might

be formed by their meaning.

P.J.M. I was thinking of the record that John gives of the Lord speaking to the Father in John 17 where He says, "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father ..." (v 24,25).

Does this further underline what predated the incarnation and therefore underlines what continued right through?

P.M. There is depth in that reference, "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". I think it may link with what has been said as to what the blessed God was looking on to in the bringing in of His own beloved Son, the One who would be here as the full display in perfection of all that God was in His holiness.

P.J.M. The Lord says, because you have had affection for me, the Father has affection for you. This circle of holy affection is extending.

P.M. I think the Holy Spirit would help us to develop increasingly in the appreciation and affection of the holy thing to see what was here when the Lord Jesus was here and to see that it was entirely and intrinsically of the Holy Spirit. There was nothing of man according to flesh in the incoming of Jesus, He took a bondman's form, but fallen man had no part in that humanity. What was here was perfect and holy.

E.F.W. I was thinking of your reference to words. The little word "also" has a great meaning, "wherefore the holy thing also which shall be born". Does that link not only with what has just gone before in the verse, but much more? The reference is to the Holy Spirit and then, "the Highest overshadow thee", but then more than that is, "wherefore the holy thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God". I was going over the link with the man that God formed originally, there was no sin there, the man was to be like God "in our image" (Gen 1: 26), but this is something even more than that.

P.M. We are treading on holy ground and therefore we need the help of one another, and above all the help of the Holy Spirit but what you say is helpful because creatorially Adam was perfect from the hand of God, morally innocent, but creatorially perfect; that must

be so. But of that man it could never be said that he was “the holy thing”. It waited for the incoming of Christ, “the holy thing also which shall be born”. Something that had never been before, it seems to me, to bring out the distinctiveness of what came in, “the holy thing also which shall be born”. It had never been seen before. The types must fall short. What was here was intrinsically of itself, entirely of the Holy Spirit. That could never have been said of Adam.

J.M.W. It says in Matthew, “that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit (1: 20). Can you open that out a little in connection with what we are saying?

P.M. I thought it brought out the nature and origin of that humanity. It was, “of the Holy Spirit”, it was not of flesh as we are, fallen creature but it was “of the Holy Spirit”. The form that He took was a bondman’s form but the One who was here intrinsically in nature was entirely of the Holy Spirit.

J.M.W. I think there is certain mystery in these things, but these scriptures would help our minds, as we make room for the Spirit, to get some impression of the tremendous matter that took place. In relation to His incoming, Philippians says “but emptied himself” (2: 7). What is involved in that?

P.M. Mr. Darby says as God He emptied himself, as Man He humbled Himself – “did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself, taking a bondman’s form”. He came into that condition, a condition of limitation. Not only did He come in as a man’s form but a bondman’s form. You might say He went as low in the rank of humanity that anyone could go in the form that He took.

E.C.B. Mr Raven commented on that translation ‘emptied Himself of what?’ He therefore preferred “made Himself of no reputation”. I do not think we can answer the question, Emptied Himself of what? As others have said, He never ceased to be God on account of what He became.

P.M. He came into a condition into which obedience and dependence attached that He had never known before.

E.C.B. You only need to read the four gospels to see that He made Himself of no reputation. If you say emptied Himself, it creates questions that are unanswerable.

P.M. We are touching what is perhaps almost beyond us but, by the Holy Spirit, we have some apprehension of it.

E.C.B. I wondered if the expression “the holy thing” does not of itself imply that God was manifest in flesh?

P.M. It must do. From the way in which Luke writes it seems to me that God came into His own testimony to bring in what could never have been brought into it by another. He came into it Himself.

E.C.B. Corinthians bears on that.

P.M. The teaching of Corinthians is important for us. We have in chapter 3 the “ministers of the new covenant” (v 6) and the mediator, and then in chapter 4, “having this ministry ... we faint not. But we have rejected the hidden things of shame ... nor falsifying the word of God, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God” (vv 1-5). Then in chapter 5 we are taken up as in Christ, “So if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation” (v 17). When it comes to ourselves holiness must relate to what is in Christ, it is formed in relation to that which is in Christ, it could never be attached to man in the flesh. We have, “if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation”. In chapter 6 we are made to realise that if we are in Christ we do not belong in the world from which He has been rejected. Chapter 7 He says, “let us purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness”.

D.J.H. New creation – the fact that it is creation must mean that it is of God?

P.M. Yes, it must be of God, it must take its character from Christ, “if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation”.

D.J.H. It bears no relation, save the identity of the person, to what was there in Adam, does it?

P.M. No, it does not. It is of God Himself. The Spirit would help to locate that work in ourselves that that work may be furthered and nurtured in the soul, but it is of Himself, not of man according to nature.

D.J.H. You can see, although the “holy thing” is absolutely unique being intrinsically such, that others are brought to be in accord with that because they are of God. Is that right?

P.M. That is something that I was feeling after in suggesting these passages. While there was what was intrinsic in Jesus without any mixture at all, yet what is being formed in man as in Christ is of the same order. If there is a testimony in the present moment, it seems to me that the testimony is maintained in conditions of holiness.

D.E.R. The leaven may affect us – professed nearness to God, the right ground and the right blessings – but Corinthians helps us to see that unless we are found marked by holiness in our associations and fellowship and walk here we are in a false position.

P.M. Therefore separation and sanctification are essential if there is to be a holy testimony. We are not taken out of the world, but we are taken out of the associations of the world. That is what the believer is as in Christ.

D.E.R. It is the difference between Laodicea and Philadelphia.

P.M. Yes, and the promise here would encourage us to go in for it, “I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”. Divine Persons are setting before us here, not exactly the gift of sonship that we speak of so often, but they are setting before us the way in which They would come into our circumstances here so that there would be no lack on the part of the believer as called out from the worldly associations of life.

D.A.B. You referred to the key to the gospel of Luke – his concern to present not only what was seen distinctively in Jesus but the circle into which that holy thing came? I think that should also be at the end when He shall return. The angel says in the Acts He, “shall thus

come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven” (1: 11). He went up from them. In relation to the ark we might say that, God actually begins with the collection of all the material for the tabernacle and then speaks about the ark; then all that material comes together. I wondered whether that was something we see in Luke? The manifestation of the true ark brings to light what will become a sanctuary for the housing of that precious thing.

P.M. It is very attractive, “every one whose heart prompteth him” (Exod 25: 1).

D.A.B. That is where the perfecting of holiness in God’s fear is worked out, is it? It is with that Person as the centre. We are brought out of Egypt and set apart to provide a dwelling place for God in Christ.

P.M. I thought that was attractive at the end of Luke, “And he led them out as far as Bethany” (24: 50). He was not going up from Jerusalem from which He had been cast out, but from that circle in Bethany that had centred everything in Him. The heave offering was there in Bethany, they made everything of Christ. It is from there that He goes, but He leaves here what is in character the holy testimony to which He will come again.

D.A.B. I think we should be exercised as speaking about these things that He “shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven”. He was able to depart from a circle that had been sanctified by making Him its centre and separating themselves to Him.

P.M. He became entirely for them the point of gathering and the point of their affection. I wonder, how much is Christ the point of gathering in the present day?

E.C.B. The instructions to us, or to believers, in the verses you read in 2 Corinthians 6 are not out of law or rule, but they are because God is there, “I will dwell among them, and walk among them” (v 16). Does that not correspond to “the holy thing” in another day?

P.M. I thought so and the committal of divine Persons to what is here. It says, "I will dwell among them ... and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters". Think of the blessed God committing Himself to persons that desire to be here in suitability to Himself. He says, I will be among them, but then He says, "Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit". I suppose that is not only what we find around us but also within us, "perfecting holiness in God's fear".

E.C.B. The other scripture you read, in Hebrews, is not the idea of chastening for punishment, but to keep us within the order of divine discipline?

P.M. In Corinthians, as in Romans, there is holiness which is formed in us by the Holy Spirit, but when we come to Hebrews the chastening is in view of our partaking of His holiness. That is a very high standard for us.

E.C.B. Is not the chastening that we might be partakers of His holiness?

P.M. Yes.

E.C.B. The question was raised recently as to the difference between discipline and chastening. I think chastening is to keep us within the ambit of divine discipline. I think about this in relation to the army: the army is a completely disciplined service, but if you get out of the discipline you have to be chastened in order to bring you back within the discipline and order that God has established. I thought that was rather illustrated in the scriptures in relation to the Father's chastening, that it is not punitive, it is to bring us back into the divine order.

P.M. And maintain in keeping with His holiness not only our holiness as for Him, but in keeping with His holiness. So in Hebrews 12 He conducts Himself to us as towards sons. The Father does not lose sight of what we are from the divine side, but He serves us from that view point in order that we might be partakers of His holiness.

D.J.H. I was looking at this subject during the week and I see that this word holiness – the notes help us – is unique here, it is never used elsewhere. That is very striking, “his holiness”. You could not think of anything more holy. You referred to a standard, but “his holiness” is tremendous.

P.M. What do you understand by it?

D.J.H. I do not know that I understand anything except the distinctiveness of who we are speaking of. We are speaking of the Father of spirits, we are speaking of God, “his holiness”, and yet we are to be partakers of His holiness.

P.M. Would it be right to think of the family idea here with the Father, holding us in relation to His own thoughts for us in sonship, and His chastening having in view that we might be at home in that circle, the family circle in which the Father Himself is supreme. We become partakers of His holiness, enjoying the atmosphere of His love, settled in the presence of One so infinitely great.

D.J.H. And to be known at the present time because 2 Corinthians 6 is the family side, sons and daughters. It is to be known at the present time.

P.M. It is and it bears on the way the testimony of our Lord is to continue. The chastening lies behind it, but what is in view is the testimony carried through at its right level. It was seen in infinite purity in Christ but it is to be carried through, and the chastening comes that we might be partakers of His holiness.

J.M.W. The word “his” there, in one sense could almost be superfluous because there is no other holiness. It could read, partaking of holiness. Do you think the word “his” is put in in the Spirit’s wisdom to occupy our hearts with the source of it?

P.M. I think so and to make us settled in the presence of the Father while we are moving through this scene. I think that is what is in view that we are made at home through the chastening as suited to that very scene where the Father is. We wonder often why there is so much pressure among us – no doubt it is the cause of much

prayer and waiting on the Lord but I wonder if the testimony in the present moment requires the chastening of the Father in a distinctive way in order that the features of holiness might be maintained through to the end.

D.E.B. I was wondering in relation to the scripture before us as to the word 'partaking'. Does that mean something that we reach out and appropriate or is it something conferred?

P.M. I thought that it was what we are brought in to, what we lay hold of as embraced in the Father's affections, we become partakers of it. In the family, we are brought into the very atmosphere where the Father's love is known, His chastening needed to maintain us in keeping with it, but we are brought in to that very atmosphere.

D.E.B. It is not exactly mysterious, it is something that you would know if you have it.

P.M. Yes, and you would know where it is enjoyed. We know it in the presence of the Father, we are there in perfect liberty all is for His pleasure, and we are partakers of His holiness.

J.McK. Does it involve being formed in the divine nature? God was His own testimony in Jesus. There is something that is of Himself, not simply by profession but in character.

P.M. That is a very high standard, is it possible?

J.McK. It is normal. It is the only thing that God accepts, what He has wrought of Himself. Mr. Raven made a great deal of the divine nature in the saints.

P.M. It is normal: we may be in danger of settling for something lower than what is normal, but it is normal. What we have in this chapter is the Father of Spirits and He is forming the spirits of the saints, He is doing that through His own chastening and disciplinary ways, but He is forming our spirits in order that the divine nature might be brought into expression in His testimony.

E.C.B. Does not Luke 15 bring out something of this? "I am no longer worthy to be called thy son ... Bring out the best robe" (vv 21,22). The chastening has made one fit for the best robe.

P.M. Yes, and made Him at home as a partaker with the divine nature. I think that helps with your brother's question. He is brought in to be perfectly suited and at home where the Father is.

D.A.B. There is quite an interesting illustration of chastening in that chapter. The Father let the son have his own way, and it proved to be a very chastening experience. Maybe we think that there is a contrast between having our own way and being chastened but the Lord may use one for the other. I like the way that the servant who goes out seems to recognise this thought, "Thy brother is come and thy father has killed the fatted calf" (v 27). He recognised the identity that that son now had with his father.

P.M. What you say is important, sometimes the Father lets us go our own way. We know it in our own histories, He sometimes lets us go our own way, not that we might be harmed, but that we might prove the sufficiency of what He is and what Christ is in our returning.

D.A.B. It was that impression (and you might wonder what it was based on) that His Father had not changed that proved a turning point in the son's life.

P.M. Yes, and the disposition of the Father's heart. Whilst not going into the far country, he never ceased to keep his eye on him, he was always there, but he let him go that he might prove the emptiness of what was outside and the fulness of what was in the father's house.

D.A.B. Peter refers to escaping "the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1: 4), that is actually what the younger son experienced. In spite of himself he ended up escaping from the world that had nothing for him.

E.C.B. Would not partakers of His holiness make a vast difference to the service of God?

P.M. Yes, it underlies it.

E.C.B. Is it enjoyed?

P.M. You would have to answer that for yourself as I would.

E.C.B. It is not just a question of new ground, it is a question of a nature fit for enjoying the presence of the Father. How great that is.

P.M. And coming to know the Father's nature.

S.H. Scripture says, "holiness becometh thy house, O Jehovah, for ever" (Ps. 93: 5). I wonder if that should affect our gatherings, I was thinking of the holiness of God.

P.M. It should, and more than our gatherings: it should affect us all the time because we are never outside of God's house. That is why I read in Peter because Peter speaks of your, "holy conversation" or manner of life. I have to pull myself up, and maybe I am not alone in this, is there a holy testimony in the present day? "Holiness becometh thy house, O Jehovah, for ever" – we thank God that in some measure there is, but have I a part in it? We are not just proceeding in a round of meeting-going, valuable as the meetings are, but is there that formative work of the Spirit that is maintaining here what would be suited to the day of God? It seems to me that the "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God" really suggests that there are already conditions that are in keeping with it at the present moment.

D.J.H. Is it of note in relation to what you are saying and what has been mentioned, that when Paul speaks of how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house, he immediately goes on to say, "And confessedly the mystery of piety is great. God has been manifested in flesh" (1 Tim 2: 16). Does that link back to Luke 1?

P.M. To the perfect standard. If we are having a part in God's house and in His testimony, that is the standard that pervades it. I believe the Lord may exercise me, and not only me, as to whether there is maintained today a holy testimony. It was perfect in Jesus, it could be nothing else, but is it here today?

E.C.B. That is the critical question of the present day especially amongst ourselves.

P.M. It is not to unsettle us but to exercise us to have a part in it, and to have a part in it as Peter came into it, "Lord to whom shall we go?"

thou hast words of life eternal; and we have believed and known that thou art the holy one of God", John 6: 68,69.

E.F.W. Would that not strengthen our links with one another? Nature does not always tend to support holy links with one another, but that is really what we want to arrive at and what would preserve us in the present day?

P.M. And the only links we have together are the links that we have in the Lord. I say that carefully, we may bring other things into them, but the link that we have together is our link in the Lord. I am not excluding the bond of the Holy Spirit in that, but the link that we have is a link in the Lord. Let us not corrupt that by bringing into it things that do not belong in it. He says, "what ought ye to be". That may be a question I need to ask myself, "what ought ye to be in holy conversation and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming day of God".

A.McS. Do you think some sense of the day of God resting in our spirits and what is involved in it would regulate our lives down here? If we think of what yet will take place as to this world, then we would touch it very lightly, do you think?

P.M. I think so and proving in the Spirit's power the reality of that world, and the features that mark the day of God. These things are real. I would say that to our younger people, these things are real and they are precious and they are far more real than anything that man can offer, but they belong in their climax in the day of God.

A.McS. It has been a concern to many as to how we conduct ourselves in the workplace. It is a genuine concern when offered social invitations and things of that character I wondered whether some sense of the greatness of the day of God resting upon our spirits would be a good preservative?

P.M. I am sure of that, to have in our souls the scene into which we really belong through divine grace. We do not belong in the world. "Let us purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit" would help the believer to move lightly through this scene, but we

belong to another world and everything there centres in Christ for God's pleasure.

LONDON

19 March 2005

Key to initials

D.A.Burr, London; D.E.Burr, Colchester; E.C.Burr, London; E.Croot, Dorking; S.Hewison, Dorking; D.J.Hutson, London; H.A.Hutson, London; J.McKay, Witney; A.McSeveney, Twickenham; P.Martin, Colchester; P.J.Mutton, Walton on the Naze; D.E.Remmington, St. Albans; J.M.Walkinshaw, Bexley; E.F.Woodford, Dorking.

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Edwin Mutton

Ephesians 2

I have read the whole chapter because it is such a wonderful chapter and it shows how fundamentally the gospel is part and parcel of what we often speak of as Ephesian truth. The very greatest thoughts of God for men are contained in the gospel.

There are two expressions which I particularly want to draw upon – one is verse 5, “we too being dead in offences” and the other is in verse 18, “ye who once were afar off are become nigh by the blood of the Christ”. These are two states, “being dead”, and “become nigh”. It is a contrast between what is so awful and what is so wonderful and is that something that we need to face.

I think most of us have been rather appalled and shocked by recent events in the Middle East. A man there is held ransom, and quoted as saying that he did not deserve to die. He wanted to be saved because he did not deserve to die. I am sure we all feel very much for that poor man and his family, but the truth is we *all* deserve to die. We cannot say we do not deserve to die. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”, Rom 3: 23. Paul tells us in Romans “the wages of sin is death” (6: 23). He adds, “but the act of favour of God, eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”. But you and I, dear friends, all deserve to die, we have no ground at all for asking God to preserve us from death because we are sinners; we have sinned and come short of His glory.

Men have an attitude (and maybe it finds an echo in our own hearts) – they do not deserve what they get – Why does God allow this? Why does He not do something about it? Disasters, wars, circumstances that come upon them – they do not deserve them, they say, do not deserve to die; do not deserve to have that kind of end. Maybe we would have said that about Job if we had been around at the time, ‘he does not deserve this’. We need to come to it, all of us, “and *you*, being dead in your offences”. As far as our

eternal salvation is concerned, as far as our future is concerned it is absolutely black without any ray of hope unless God intervenes.

Thank God He has intervened. The Lord Jesus, "being rich, became poor" (2 Cor 8: 9) for our sakes. It was a divine intervention that we "by *his* poverty might be enriched". Not by His riches. We might have thought that the riches that are God's, the place in glory that the Lord Jesus had, that by His richness, and His riches, He would have been able to effect a salvation; but it is by His poverty that we have been enriched. It is the way that God has taken to meet the condition in which we were, and are if we are still in our sins, dead. People speak of that, they have an expression that certain things are dead in the water, absolutely no life, going nowhere. That is man away from God, not exactly going nowhere, because he is going on to judgment. The inevitability of death and judgment is something that people are not prepared to face.

It says here, "God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us". God has forgiveness in His heart for every man, woman and child on this earth. That they cannot experience that forgiveness unless they repent is true, but God comes first. God always comes first in every circumstance, in every age, in every situation. God and His heart and His love and His forgiveness came long before there was any peep of response or appreciation of need in my heart or yours; it has all come from God's side. God said to Adam as to the serpent that it is he who will be crushed (see Gen 3: 15). That did not come from Adam, that came from God, that was God's. God saw right down through time that this great work of atonement and redemption would have to be undertaken because of the condition that man was in. That is the gospel. You and I can do nothing, God has done everything. "God being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us, we too being dead in offences, has quickened us". Who apart from God could quicken what is dead? No one naturally can do that, you cannot quicken what is dead. That is what is so final about death, that you can do absolutely nothing. While there is a flicker of life there is hope. Once death comes in things are fixed and cannot be

reversed. But God has come in and He has quickened us with the Christ, “ye are saved by grace, and has raised us up together, and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus”.

We need to face the fact that we are shut up to God. Those of us who are Gentiles, doubly so. The Jews were God’s people, they had a claim on God because He had chosen them as His people.

We cannot even say that. Not that it would save the Jew, he still comes under this universal condemnation that “all have sinned and come short of the glory God” (Rom 3: 23), and even with the favour that God showed to His earthly people and the guidance He gave them on how to live, they died and their carcasses were strewn in the wilderness. But how much more it is so of those of us of the nations? What a terrible plight to be in, no hope and without God in the world.

That is the position of every one of us, dear friends, but thank God He has come in from His own side and He has provided the sacrifice, provided the way of redemption, provided the great scope of redemption. What it says is that we who are in this dire situation having no hope and without God, “in Christ Jesus ... are become nigh”. I want to stress that, we have become nigh. God has not bridged the distance, He has removed it, taken it away, we are “*become* nigh”. It does not say here, (it would be true in another setting) that God has brought us nigh, but it says, “are *become* nigh”. It is as much a position as was the position that we were “dead in offences”. That is the truth of the gospel. God takes us from one situation and puts us in another, “are become nigh”. The work of Christ does that through the blood, “ye are become nigh by the blood of the Christ”. God puts the saved sinner, who He reaches in His mercy and saves in His grace by Him, “become nigh” and nothing can alter that. What a wonderful thing that in the gospel we change position absolutely through the grace of God. We often speak about changing our man, that is our side, but as far as God is concerned, He takes you from the dung hill and He sets you among nobility; “become nigh”. So, there is no danger of you slipping away as to your place before God, you are become nigh and nothing can alter

that. In your experience distance comes in, a cloud may fill your sight, but as far as God is concerned the work of Christ has taken you from being dead in your offences and your sins and you have become nigh. That is why I think this chapter is such a wonderful chapter, such a wonderful expression of the gospel because it shows that God does not leave us in the condition of being dead in offences, He quickens us and we are become nigh.

Our standing before God is absolute, nothing can touch that. You can say to any believer that He has become nigh. The younger son might have wandered off into the far country, but he was still a son, he still had that position. He did not look like it, he did not act like it, and he certainly did not go to places that showed that that was what he wanted, but that was the situation. A believer is become nigh and he can always return to the joy of that position. If it were not so, that young man would never have been able to count on the father's grace, mercy, compassion and forgiveness. He was a son and he had become nigh and his father took him and gave him the experience of what that really meant. That is the gospel. We have become nigh and everything that stood out against us, everything that separated us from God and maybe separated us from one another is gone. The great subject of this chapter turns into that, that God has taken these two disparate people and set them together. That is a consequence of the gospel. The real essence of the gospel firstly is that you and I have become nigh. Then we find that God has slain the enmity so that we are before God in nearness. It would be unthinkable that God had made you nigh and had made me nigh that you and I are at enmity. The gospel, therefore, in its scope, solves every personal problem that there is.

Indeed, the gospel is the answer to every problem in our lives. Individual, family or collective, the answer is in the gospel. The seed of everything is in the gospel. Mr Stoney said, in the gospel, as you put your faith in Christ you receive everything, there is nothing more to have. You say, I understand and enjoy a lot more now than I did the day I was converted. That may be, but you had it all, you had it all in Christ; God has made you nigh, "are become nigh", there is

nothing that you will enjoy eternally that you do not receive in the gospel as you open your heart to God's overtures of divine grace.

It is a wonderful effect of the gospel that God has dealt not only with sin, he has dealt with all these things that are the result of sin; enmity is one of them. There are various degrees of it, you may not like someone, or you may actually hate them, but it is all enmity anyway. God has slain it, it is gone, there is no reason why I should be at enmity with any other believer. Now, that is not practically so, there are many things that keep us at a distance, even those of us who claim to be in fellowship together. As far as God is concerned He has slain the enmity and both are become nigh, He has made them one, "through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father". It struck me this morning as we went into the Father's presence, that every believer has that right to go into His presence, God is saying that we have access. What a sad thing to think that access is for me, but is it not for someone else? God has slain that enmity and what comes in here is that we have "both access by one Spirit to the Father". If I can go in and you can go in, God has raised us up together and made us sit down together. It will not be different places in heaven for those I get on with and those I do not; no, God has slain the enmity.

I think that is the great scope of the gospel that we need to have in our hearts. We need to work towards that. We know it is not fully true in practice, there are many believers with whom sadly we cannot share full and happy fellowship with, but as far as the gospel is concerned that is what has been secured, that we have been made nigh and the enmity and the distance and the wall of partition have gone. That is the glory of the gospel. You and I should strive to have that as our objective and to work towards that. If we do not work towards it then we fall short of God's thought as to what He would have achieved in the gospel. The gospel is all about reconciliation, the reconciliation of God and men, and if God and men are reconciled then surely men can be reconciled. It is a very sad thing if despite that I am still out at elbows with my brother. But

sadly these things are there and the gospel is the answer, “are become nigh”.

We apply that in an initial sense, we have been afar off and we have been dead in offences and now we have become nigh. As you go down this chapter you find all these words that speak about togetherness. For example: “fellow-citizens”. Think of that, “fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the corner-stone”. Everything takes character from Him.

There can be no discrepancies. There cannot be some odd stone that stands out with my name written on it. Jesus Christ is the corner-stone, “in whom all the building fitted together increases to” – different things? No, “to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit”. This is Ephesian language, God is going on with what is whole, God is building us in to one blessed work and that is going on at the present time. If we really have the gospel in our hearts we will not rest in anything less, be it for ourselves, be it for our brethren, be it for believers generally.

Paul saw this all fall away practically. John saw what Ephesus became. They left their first love, they left the truth of it, the truth of this ministry that Paul gave them and alas what weakness and failure has come into church history. But let us cleave to what scripture says, let us cleave to what is true, and it begins with us having a real sense in the gospel that we have “become nigh”. Let us not leave that, let us not move away from God. God does not move away from us, we move away from God. If you feel your relationship with God, your communion with divine Persons is not what it should be, it is not God’s fault, it is your fault. God does not move away, we have “become nigh”. God wants us nigh, He wants us to keep there, He wants us to be there and He wants us to come out and act in that spirit of mercy and grace and reconciliation which is the fruit of the gospel. We have been taken from one situation, we have been placed in another environment, and God intends us to stay there practically. We cannot alter our standing, our state may

get better or worse as we go through life, but we should strive to be in accord of what is true of us that it may be true in us and about us because of the effect of the gospel in our lives.

That was my exercise, these two different situations, “dead in offences” and “become nigh by the blood of the Christ”. I noticed it the other day and I had not really noticed it in the same way. It does not say, ‘ye who once were afar off are *brought* nigh by the blood of the Christ’, but the language is “are *become* nigh” which is more than a directional thing, it is a positional thing and that is what God has done in the gospel and He wants us to stay there to enjoy what it is to be built together “to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit”. Once something is built into a building it stays there, you cannot exactly take odd bricks out and put them somewhere else, the building is built together and every part is integral to what is going on. That is what God has done with us, we have been brought into a place where this is going on and where things are fixed for God’s pleasure and every believer, every soul coming into the gain of these things is built into this building, one glorious work that is soon going to be taken and translated to glory to be there forever. May the Lord just strengthen our hearts, affect our souls and stimulate us to work towards this great end which is the purpose of God for all men that they should come into this nearness to Him, for time and present experience and certainly for eternity. May He bless the word.

COLCHESTER