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MENDING AND REPAIRING

Matthew 4: 18-22; Galatians 6: 1; Nehemiah 3: 1-12; 12: 31-43

G.A.B. What is before us in these scriptures is a dual thought of mending and repairing. If something needs mending or repairing it must evidently be broken in the first place and I need hardly remind the brethren that we live in a broken day. The church publicly is in ruins and we are part of it, and indeed have contributed to it. I say this in passing; I feel for myself that some of us who are older have a particular responsibility as having contributed to that. It is not something that we want to be occupied with; when a matter is judged the guilt is lifted, but I think there is enough to give us sufficient ballast to keep us humble for the rest of our time. I do not wish to occupy the brethren with what is negative, rather to see how things can be mended as far as lies within our power. Evidently we cannot change the public position nor can we change the past, but for the Lord's sake as well as for our own happiness we want to have things suitable and right for Him. In another connection the apostle says, "as far as depends on you", Rom 12: 18. We are not responsible for what others do or fail to do but let us go as far as we can with this mending work.

In the passage in Matthew 4 we have two sets of two brothers, "Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers" – we know more about Peter than we do about Andrew, but there is a kind of evangelical ring about this, especially in the light of what the Lord says, "I will make you fishers of men".

You can see how Peter cast the net into the sea very successfully on the day of Pentecost and how great the result was. The other two brothers, James and John, are not said to be fishers, although no doubt they were, nor does the Lord say He will make them fishers of men, but He calls them and they follow Him. They are "mending their trawl-nets". We know more about John than we do about James, (James had a very short period of service), but John seems to come down to our own day, the time of brokenness when there is a great deal of mending to be done.

I read the verse in Galatians to bring out an example of how this could work. The footnote tells us it is the same word that is used, “restore”, or mend. In Nehemiah we have the idea of repairing which is very similar but perhaps a more structural idea, because they are rebuilding the wall. It is very interesting to take account of the different occupations of the persons who are doing it, their characteristics. I felt that we might see how Paul’s ministry and service comes out in these passages we have read, especially as it leads up to the service of God in the last one.

E.C.B. I am very glad to hear the subject taken up, because I think Lord would work in our hearts at the present time, as to whether there is any possibility of restoration from difficulties which we have known in our own times.

G.A.B. Peter is prominent at the beginning and used singularly in casting the net widely and large numbers were secured, but when you come down to our own day it is a question of mending the nets. It might involve that we might have to go down a little bit ourselves to do that.

E.C.B. I think that is the first step. You have not read the scripture in Galatians to occupy us with potential faults but the idea of restoration, and whether there is anything that we ourselves might be led to do under the Lord’s hand. There are exercises current in this area at the present time as to mending and I think for our part one thing we should do is make it simple in humility.

G.A.B. Make it simple. We were speaking last night about two brothers who had been at ‘logger heads’ for years. One got a touch from the Lord and went to the other in a spirit of humility and within ten minutes the matter was resolved and these two brothers went on in happy fellowship until the end of their days. It shows what can be done if we approach it from the right angle – which is downwards.

E.C.B. The reconstruction of the wall in Nehemiah is not so much to keep people out as to get back to the complete thoughts of God.

G.A.B. One thing you notice there, is that it is not a scaled down version, it is the same wall that is repaired and brought back into

function. That is what you want when we speak of restoring a brother, to bring him back into function to fill out the part that belongs to him.

D.J.H. There is that which remains, “the firm foundation of God stands”, 2 Tim 2: 19. We need to work in relation to that in this matter of mending and repairing?

G.A.B. It is the work of God that you are seeking in persons. Deep calls to deep, the work of God in me relates to the work of God in you and if someone has lost his way (we all do at times), by reaching out to the work of God in the person you have a point of contact, and then if you are in the good and enjoyment of what we profess we are going to be drawn towards one another.

D.J.H. Peter was to be made a fisher of men, but there was a time when he had to cast a hook; that is line fishing, just to catch one at a time. That is the way Peter was caught, Andrew first finds Peter his brother. I wondered whether that side of things enters into it, each one of us needs to be prepared in relation to this matter.

G.A.B. It is very much an individual matter. We will come to the idea of what is collective, but you have to begin with the individual relationship. After all if persons have gone away (I do not like to say gone astray because that sounds patronising), but if persons are not with us, it is a question of reaching out to them where they are and recognising that they have an inheritance and perhaps they are not enjoying it. You want to attract people. I am not saying that we ignore principles. There is a righteous basis for all that we are saying.

D.J.H. We were looking at home this morning at Paul who says, “to all I have become all things”, 1 Cor 9: 22. We have to be careful in applying that but nevertheless as we are in relation to our brethren we can find common ground with them. The work of God in you is of the same order as the work of God in me and we have to work from that base.

G.A.B. That is exactly as I see it.

E.F.W. Is there something in the fact they are brothers? Brotherhood starts at the very beginning and you grow up. These two couples are very interesting because one takes a lead and the other supports. Some of us are not very good at supporting and certainly not at leading, but they are all qualities working together. Is that something in your mind?

G.A.B. It is indeed because every true believer is a brother in Christ: we cannot always say a brother in the Lord, that involves something more. A brother in the Lord means that that person is walking in subjection to the Lord involving the following out of divine principles and the principles of the fellowship.

D.A.B. If you embark on a repair, whether a net or a wall, you would start where no breakdown or tear had occurred. You cannot mend a net in thin air, you tie on where the net is not rent. I wondered whether that is seen in John's ministry. That which was from the beginning has never broken down and he presents things in a rather stark way, but no one could say that what John says has ever been untrue. He has a vision of the pattern and he is in touch with those parts of it which in expression have never broken down.

G.A.B. John gives us another net which did not break in chapter 21, but what we are facing here is something which has happened. It has happened in history. I was thinking of how early it came in in the Acts. Peter cast the net and such a great result came about, but when you get to chapter 6 of the Acts you find a snag occurring in the net, there is a murmuring of the Hellenists (v 1). You can pass over the matter of Ananias and Sapphira because that was a personal thing, but what actually began to take place in chapter 6 was a grouping together. It was not a very serious thing, just carelessness, someone was overlooked in the daily administration, but the fact was that these Hellenists all got together and there was a party movement. What I would like to think about as to that is how quickly it was dealt with and Stephen comes forward as a man who is able to handle the situation, the apostles pronounced upon the matter and it was done. That matter is never heard of again, so the net was mended.

D.A.B. Satan tried to force a rend in the net through the Jews and failed, the net held, but it is sobering, and may link with what you said about humility, that it was something that arose in the company that caused a rent in the net. Paul says, "from among your own selves", Acts 20: 30. I suppose in relation to the wall, although it was knocked down by Nebuchadnezzar, if we look at it morally the power had gone out from the city from the inside. Do you think that is something that we need to be exercised about as to our own moral worthiness and capacity to take the strains that, if allowed, would break things up?

G.A.B. You will find in regard to what you are saying it is the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who are used to stir the people up to proceed with the matter. I suppose in one sense that is what we are doing today. The real defects were internal.

D.J.R. In Acts 15 there was a lot of strong feeling so much so that there could have been division, but Paul and Barnabas related what God had done and the occupation with what God had done brought about a general rejoicing so that the truth could be brought in by men like Peter and James?

G.A.B. I was thinking about that very thing. It is really the next snag that comes into the net after chapter 6 of Acts and it could have been very serious. The apostles got together about that, and though I am not saying that we can have these church councils today, the fact is that it was dealt with and it was dealt with promptly. I think this is very important what you bring up, that things are dealt with before they get time to fester. We have seen that in our own experience, many times a thing goes on and on. It becomes so complex that you forget what the original problem was. Let us act as the apostle enjoins in Galatians, "Brethren, if even a man be taken in some fault". It does not say what the fault is and we are not going to go into any detail or surmise as to what the fault was, but the fact is that if something has occurred like this then there is a job for those who are spiritual.

E.C.B. That is a very testing remark – ‘who are spiritual’? When we think about the cherubim in the garden of Eden we think of them largely to keep wrong things away, but it has also been said in regard to the cherubim in the temple that they were looking to see who was coming. Perhaps we need more of the second than we have had. Do you not think that self-justification is one of the greatest hindrances to mending?

G.A.B. I am sure of that, even if you can be justified, do you really have to insist on that? The Lord prophetically in the Psalms restored, “which I took not away” (Ps 69: 4). I think we can all afford to give a bit. If there is anything I can sacrifice as to my own reputation let me do it. We are not advocating giving up one whit as to the truth and divine principles – that needs to be made clear. We will stand firm as to that and guard it.

E.C.B. We need special help from the Spirit in working out the application of principles. We may be clear about the principles, but we need help from the Spirit in order to see how things are to work out in a day of breakdown.

G.A.B. In 2 Timothy, which has been referred to Paul so gently speaks to Timothy as his “beloved child”. There is a kind of softness about that.

E.C.B. We perhaps need to learn more of humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God (see 1 Peter 5: 6).

H.A.H. The Lord said prophetically, “He is near that justifieth me” (Isa 50: 8), He did not justify Himself, did He?

G.A.B. The Lord was never justified down here. Do we look to be justified in the place where He was not?

H.A.H. That bears on the Supper, “until He come”, that is when He will be justified publicly.

G.A.B. We know that He is justified in heaven. He is exalted and glorified there, but in this world He was never seen again after the cross. He was seen by His own after He rose from the dead but the world never saw Him. So, so far as this world is concerned,

whatever fine cathedrals may be built and professions made in the world, the Lord Jesus is rejected. He remains to the world the crucified One who the world had no use for. If that is the kind of Lord that I am to follow, can I expect anything different?

Q.P. Is the truth of this set on in the Lord Jesus Himself? I was thinking particularly of the way that He handled the two on the way to Emmaüs. It says that they were downcast but He was prepared to spend time with them and go over the scriptures patiently with them until there was something in their hearts that led to recovery (see Luke 24: 17).

G.A.B. He went along with them whilst they were travelling in the wrong direction and “*he* made as though he would go farther” (v 28). I think that is the spirit that ought to mark us as seeking to work on restoration.

P.M. How would you mend somebody?

G.A.B. I am not sure that I could give you a straight answer to that, but what I do see is that you would need to be spiritual to do it and that is quite a test. When you read the epistle to Galatians you would hardly think that in all these assemblies there would be a single spiritual person but Paul does not say if there are spiritual people amongst you, do this, he says, “ye who are spiritual”. There were spiritual persons there and I believe there are spiritual persons in this room; we would seek to move in that direction. Do you think that it corresponds with the idea of priesthood in the Old Testament?

P.M. I am sure it would. The disciples in Matthew, whilst they were mending the nets, they had to get their relations with the Lord right. If my relations with the Lord are right will I be able to help or mend another in his relation with the Lord? It is not exactly the joining of a company but the restoration of links with the Lord and normal links.

G.A.B. I think that is a very important thing to see. Neither of these sets of two brothers question what the Lord said to them. He called them and they followed Him. They were the right kind of persons to do this. They, in principle, would be spiritual.

D.A.B. You have to have some idea of what the brother's standing ought to be. You have to see him right because otherwise your work might fall short or take him in the wrong direction. I wonder what Elisha thought Naaman looked like? He never saw him but he pictured a man whose flesh was as a little child (see 2 Kings 5: 14).

He had God's view of Naaman and he knew how Naaman could arrive at it.

G.A.B. I gather that is the force of the word restore, see footnote 'g' to 1 Corinthians 1: 10 – 'Where all the members have each its own place or make a whole; or, if broken, are restored to one complete whole, as 'mending'. You have got to see where that person fits into the body. Samuel says, "we will not sit at table till he come hither", 1 Sam 16: 11. Typically that is the Lord who is referred to there in David, but just to make an application of it, you sit down to break bread and see the circle and perhaps there is someone missing.

D.A.B. I wonder if it is the moving of the body that stirs the exercise you are raising. It is not simply that the numbers need replenishment, but it is a desire to have other participants with whom spiritual things can be shared together and exercises in the testimony worked out.

G.A.B. You want to see that person in his proper place. I know it is not always possible to bring about this restoration if will is at work, but even in Matthew 18 the objective is to gain thy brother, you want to see the circle complete and the person enjoying what belongs to him. If he has forfeited it that is sad, but a spiritual person would be able to work on the conscience if necessary, but I think we have to make this proviso that a spiritual person would know what to do. We cannot sit here and say how it has got to be done, but what we can say is the spirit in which it has to be done.

D.J.H. We need one another, the ear cannot say to the eye, I have no need of thee (see 1 Cor 12: 16). That would involve the working of love. I was thinking of that side of things, it is not simply that we want them – as we do – for the enjoyment of things and ultimately for the enrichment of the service of God, but we need one another.

G.A.B. You know the figure of the human body is used in regard to the body of Christ, and you know in actual fact that if one member is hurt you are at a great disadvantage until that is mended. I think that is important; we need one another and the body has to function in its completeness.

D.E.R. We have been well taught that the point of departure is the point of recovery. If recovery is to take place there must be the facing of the moral issue at the point of departure otherwise we just go down to the level of Christendom.

G.A.B. That is what a spiritual person would be able to do, he would be able to bring the conscience into activity so that a proper judgment is arrived at. It is not just going out and saying 'come and join us' that is not what we are saying. We want restoration on a proper basis, but it is a spiritual person who is able to do that. It is easy enough to lose people but to restore them requires spirituality.

D.A.B. It is interesting that it is John who says, "grace and truth subsists through Jesus Christ", John 1: 17. I think Mr Taylor commented on that that grace comes first in the *modus operandi*.

What has been said is absolutely right, that the truth has to be faced, but you might not be able to get at the heart of the problem first: you might have to gain your brother before you could deal with that question.

G.A.B. What did the Lord do with the woman in John 4 when she approached? He did not say, you are living in sin, no, He said, "Give me to drink" (v 7) and then He spoke to her about living water. She then said, I want this, and then He said, there is the matter of your husband and all the moral side had to come up. That is a perfect example of how we should go about this matter. As you point out, "grace and truth subsists". Mr Darby has a very important note on that, in English it is not really proper grammar, but he sacrifices the correctness of grammar for the accuracy of the fact that grace and truth "subsists". It is one thing united in Christ. You cannot emphasise grace at the expense of truth and you cannot emphasise truth at the expense of grace.

D.A.B. Just to make it very simple, the law was given by Moses, and Moses is dead. The whole covenant that relates to Moses and the place that Israel gives to Moses has to acknowledge that he is dead, but grace and truth subsists in a living person. That is what makes the whole of the present time different.

G.A.B. Exactly.

E.C.B. The operations which were referred to in the scriptures you have read relate to where people are now; they do not relate to where people were twenty, thirty, fifty years ago, they relate to where people are now.

G.A.B. It is all very testing. I do not see that we can expect restoration to take place unless we are right in ourselves. The Lord will work and He can work sovereignly.

E.C.B. If we speak about the walls as representing the principle of separation, what you would love to hear was that all the choirs were complete and every part from the tenors, bases, descants, that they were all there.

G.A.B. That is right and all standing in the house of God. In Nehemiah there is a great deal of detail which we cannot go into. It is more a structural idea, rebuilding, but the persons who are doing this building under Nehemiah's direction all have interesting occupations. The building is going ahead and gates are being set up with their locks and bars, and that would be very proper in view of security and keeping out of evil. For the younger ones we could point out that the sheep gate, the first one, is not said to have locks and bars – why is that?

E.C.B. "I am the door of the sheep".

G.A.B. That is right.

E.C.B. One thing is notable about all these people who are named, most of them we have never heard of before. It is the common people who take on this repair work, not so much with a view to keeping things out, but protectively for what is going to be for God. When you come to this you cannot help but be reminded of the holy

city, not that any of us built the holy city, but you cannot help being reminded of it. It never had any other aspect than completeness. It is just like the loaf at the Supper.

G.A.B. I think that is fine. It is very important to bring that forward, “we being many, are one loaf” (1 Cor 10: 17), it really involves every believer. Then you look round the circle and say, they are not all here.

E.C.B. In regard to 1 Corinthians 1 the answer to “perfectly united in the same mind” (v 10) is “we, being many ... are one body”, 1 Cor 10: 17). Both those scriptures are written to the same company.

J.W. Does the sheep gate speak to us of God’s sovereignty? I wondered if we have to begin there in relation to ourselves? God has acted sovereignly and in recovery He has acted sovereignly. Do we have to see that the first movement begins with God in recovery?

G.A.B. I am sure that is right because the sheep, it would appear in this context, are reliable, they do not need locks and bars to be kept in. In John 10 it says, “and shall go in and shall go out and shall find pasture” (v 9), they are like John’s sheep, they do not wander.

J.W. It really speaks of the reliability of God’s work. John emphasises that in his gospel.

G.A.B. The important thing to note is that it was Eliashib the high priest with his brethren who built that gate. I know he did not behave very well later on, but at this point he is right and I think the idea of liberty is governed by the priest.

E.F.W. Would you say something about the stress here on being hallowed? This is connected with the sheep-gate, I do not think it is connected with any other, but it is stressed with the sheep-gate.

G.A.B. It seems to me to be a very refined aspect of the work of God, it is trustworthy. We have often been taught that John’s sheep do not stray, but we are not in the meeting all the time. We can come in and that is a very blessed experience such as we are having now, but we have to go out as well. We have to go out to work, college, school, wherever; can these sheep be trusted not to stray?

We find that sheep do stray in Luke's gospel and elsewhere. Isaiah says, "All we like sheep have gone astray" (53: 6), but John presents persons who are trustworthy, but under the eye of the priests. The priest thinks for God firstly and if we are going to enjoy liberty it can only be in relation to one who will let nothing pass which is unsuitable to God.

E.C.B. So the idea of hallowed corresponds to "holiness becometh thy house", Ps 93: 5.

G.A.B. That is true.

J.S.G. I was wondering about the reference in the first verse to the sheep-gate. It says, "they hallowed it even to the tower of Meah, to the tower of Hananeel". Hananeel means God is gracious and I wondered in regard to what we have been speaking about earlier, about "ye who are spiritual restore such", that the tower is a landmark of God's grace and in Timothy it says, "be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus", 2 Tim 2: 1. I wondered if that would fit in with your thoughts.

G.A.B. That is very good. Each locality in that sense ought to be a tower of strength. It might be a small meeting, it may be only two or three, but these two or three in Matthew 18 have heaven's authority for what they do, so that it is indeed a tower of strength. I was thinking of how Paul's service and ministry are worked out in these sections that we have read. It might not appear on the surface but the occupations of some of these persons and the descriptions of them are very significant. There are "the men of Jericho", a goldsmith, a perfumer and there is one man who built "even over against his house", another who had his daughters with him in the work, all these things are very suggestive and come into Paul's ministry, and lead on to this great matter in chapter 12 where the "singers sang loud ... and the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off".

D.J.H. The goldsmiths were used to working with gold, Paul is working with gold even at Corinth, he speaks of "we speak wisdom

among the perfect” (1 Cor 2: 6), and as he opens the first epistle, he is really working with gold.

G.A.B. Undoubtedly that is so even in Corinth. I thought particularly at Ephesus he is a goldsmith there.

D.J.H. I was thinking as to the work of God, there is gold and if we are on the line of restoration or holding one another together it is in relation to the gold.

G.A.B. You sometimes have to mine for gold as well (that was specially so at Corinth), it is not always there on the surface and it has to be refined. That is what a spiritual person is able to bring about. The goldsmiths are able to take that material and form it into something that is of beauty and value and can be used in the service of God.

Q.P. There are two towers here, perhaps either side of the sheep-gate. I wondered whether it linked back to grace and truth because you can see that operating all the way through the gospel of John in the Lord’s dealings with people.

G.A.B. I think it would be quite just to say that. These two things are united in Christ; you cannot do without either of them.

R.W.F. Do you have anything to say about, “next to them”?

G.A.B. It is repeated again and again. I think it is something we have learned to do in the day that Nehemiah depicts. You can remember very large meetings and a few were prominent, but I think in this broken day we are speaking of, these numbers are a very tiny portion of the people, not even the whole of Judah were there or Benjamin, quite a small number, very humiliating times, but they are working together. That is what I think we have learned to do. The people had a mind to work. You feel in these times that we have together that there is a readiness of the saints to work together in love. If you were doing one piece and somebody else was doing the next piece, you would have to cooperate with them, there is a merging together in the labour and it is an astonishing thing how quickly this work was finished. In less than eight weeks the whole

wall was completed. Does that not show how immense the possibilities are even in a broken day; we can work according to the principles that are set out in Paul's ministry today.

E.C.B. How would you know it was a broken day if you had not had some concept of its entirety?

G.A.B. That is important. As you know Nehemiah first went round and surveyed the whole situation and found a very humbling condition. We need to be humbled, but see how great the result is when the wall is completed in such a short time! The service of God proceeds, that is what Paul is building up to in his ministry always.

E.C.B. There must have been something testimonial in the choirs in their going round the walls and singing, everybody could hear.

G.A.B. It was heard afar off. People would say, what is going on, I want to know more about this.

E.F.W. There is an interesting inclusion of the priests' sons. It does not say they were qualified priests but the sons were also working to the same end. That is what we would love the children to be interested in, that they can contribute something.

G.A.B. If they are brought up in that kind of environment they are going to become priests themselves.

D.A.B. Could you say something about the emphasis here on families and households and the way that some peoples' houses became incorporated into the wall? I wondered if that is where the strength of this wall was, there was a commitment in the family to the maintenance of what was due to God.

G.A.B. There was this man who built over against his house, and then too you find, "Shallum ... he and his daughters". I think we find all these things coming in to Paul's ministry and his service, he emphasises the household. Take Philippi, the first great trophy after Lydia was the jailor and he was baptised with all his house. Lydia would be like one of the daughters, and Phoebe and persons like that.

D.A.B. You are calling attention to the trades these people had, there is not a stonemason or a carpenter, there are no experts.

None of us claim to be good at this or to have done it before, but we take it up through taking up the exercises that arise in our own callings and our own daily life.

G.A.B. Paul says to Timothy in dealing with a similar day as this, “do the work of an evangelist”, 2 Tim. 4: 5. I do not think there is any evidence from the scripture that Timothy was a gifted evangelist, perhaps he was a teacher, but the work was there to be done, so Paul says do it, we are short handed.

P.M. Binnui knew what was going on in Azariah’s house and he could link on with it, he built from Azariah’s to the angle (see Neh 3: 24). I wonder if Paul did that in Corinth, “it has been shewn to me ... by those of the house”, 1 Cor 1: 11. I wondered if that could be linked on with.

G.A.B. He was shown that by spiritual persons in Corinth, however poor the general condition may have been, that that was where the gold was. The angle is a difficult bit is it not?

P.M. It gives strength to the wall?

G.A.B. It would need some skill to do that, the skill was available because of their readiness to work. Imagine a goldsmith working on a wall, or a perfumer. These were incongruous occupations. You might look around your brethren and say why are we all together? I do not think you would have chosen me if you had had the opportunity? We have not chosen one another, divine sovereignty has entered into that.

A.A.C. Could you say something about how this started with Nehemiah being before Jehovah, about God’s view in mending and in recovery? What was initially seen was a situation which was hopeless which in eight weeks was changed, but Nehemiah reminds God of His word to Moses, “yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them into the place that I have chosen to set my name there”, Neh 1: 9. That is God’s view in mending and recovery.

G.A.B. That is very true. Another thing is that it really began with the faithfulness of one man. Nehemiah when he heard the news of how far things had gone down could not hide his sorrow and grief about it. God came in for him. How quickly things begin to move when his faithfulness is demonstrated, even if it is only one man, how God can use such a person!

A.A.C. He had God's view of what could be done. Something that is hopeless cannot be mended, but what is mended starts with God, and if there is a work of God anything is possible.

G.A.B. It was not the scaled down version, it was the wall which was there from the beginning. You might have said, there are such a small number of us, we cannot work things out properly, but what we do see in these passages is that it does work. Paul's ministry works in a broken day.

A.G.S. It was workable in the recovery of Onesimus. I was thinking the art of the perfumer was there.

G.A.B. I was thinking that, the epistles to Philemon and the Philippians are the work of the perfumer. There is a real fragrance rising from these two epistles that is so pleasing to God, the richness of what was there. You have gold, perfume, the households, but it all comes together in these two choirs and it is a very triumphant end to Nehemiah's exercise. "I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great choirs and processions, on the right hand upon the wall towards the dung-gate". You cannot afford to give up being humble even in this great procession that is set up.

There are two choirs and they go in opposite directions which means that the wall was completely encompassed, the voices of singing men and women was heard in a complete sense.

E.C.B. With regard to what has just been said you get the impression that what originated with the exercise of one man very quickly embraced all the people. We long for that.

G.A.B. He must have been a man of great influence. How do you acquire that influence?

E.C.B. The man is a great influence because of what he was in himself.

G.A.B. That is right, even the king was able to discern that there was something in this man that was different. It is astonishing how God worked with a king to allow a man who was just his cup-bearer to go away for all this length of time and get all these materials provided. How God comes into a thing when we are faithful.

E.C.B. You wonder if it can be seen that we are grieved by the breakdown.

G.A.B. That is very true. Both choirs finished up in the house of God, “and the singers sang loud ... and the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off”.

LONDON

17 September 2005

Key to initials

G.A.Brown, Edinburgh; D.A.Burr, London; E.C.Burr, London; A.A.Croot, London; R.W.Flowerdew, Sunbury; J.S.Gray, Tunbridge Wells; D.J.Hutson, London; H.A.Hutson, London; P.Martin, Colchester; Q.Poore, Swanage; D.E. Remmington, St. Albans; D.J.Roberts, Gillingham; A.G.Smith, Bexley; E.F.Woodford, Dorking; J.Wright, Havering

Extract:

How many tears have we shed in regard of the brethren who have left us, and are not available to us? (J Taylor, London, 1926: Vol. 24: 345)

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Gaius Napthine

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11; Romans 5: 1, 2; Hebrews 13: 20-22

I feel I have had a word from the Lord as to peace and I would like to challenge you tonight as to whether you are enjoying peace with God. It is a real question, a real challenge for me, as well I hope as for you, whether you are enjoying peace with God. You will not find peace in this world in anything that this world has to offer by way of entertainment, persuasion or distraction. You might be able to forget the misery of your sin, the misery of your sinful history for a little while. You might be able to put to one side for a moment the thought of having to do with God, but in the glad tidings God is urging you to turn in repentance to Himself and faith towards His well beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. How simple the glad tidings are because you know from the youngest to the oldest they are applicable. Are you feeling your responsibility before God, is your conscience speaking to you? Is it guilty? Do you know the guilt that belongs to those who do not know Jesus as their sin bearer? I do not apologise for being very straight, the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (see 1 Heb 4: 12), it penetrates. It penetrated my soul and I realised that I was not fit for the presence of the holy God, I needed a redeemer, and I needed to be made clean and to be made fit. Who would make me fit for the presence of God? Who would be able? I realised I had nothing to offer, everything was tainted, everything was spoilt. If as a sinner I was to offer anything to God it would be useless, even to offer my own life, not only because it was spoilt but because in the glad tidings we are told that the offering has already been made. I commend Jesus to you as the blessed Offerer, the One who was the offering Himself for our sins, our iniquities, our lawlessnesses. Praise His Name! Praise God that He gave Jesus for you and for me. How wonderful He is. Do you know Him? He is my peace, is He yours? I tell you that you will find peace nowhere else but in the person of Jesus, in faith in Him and in the appreciation that His shed blood covers you, shelters you from all

the judgment of God that is about to come upon this world and upon mankind – a solemn matter that another had to take it upon Himself and is Himself God. He had to come if you and I were to come into blessing and enjoy God's mercy. Are you enjoying mercy tonight, are you enjoying mercy and grace realising that you know that you can sit there and you can walk out of the room, maybe different from how you walked in. You can certainly sit there and walk out of this room tonight justified by faith, counted righteous by God. Your sins washed away in the blood of Jesus and everything settled. I speak simply on account of my own simplicity and on account of the children, and on account of the urgency of the time that we are in.

There may not be another preaching of the glad tidings, maybe not another outgoing of God's word, but now is the well accepted time.

You might say not only is now the day of salvation, but for those who are in this room, including the preacher, now this very moment is the well accepted time, a time when God is not imputing sins, not condemning anyone in here, or anywhere else, He is commending His love.

You cannot help but read this scripture in Thessalonians. I read it when preaching elsewhere after the terrible tragedy in Asia on Boxing Day last year, and one would be led to read it again. You hear of events in other parts, terrible matters that come upon men, maybe attributed to what is naturally occurring in the earth and in the world, but affecting men. Has the incoming of Christ, the incoming of the Son of God into this world affected you? I would challenge you as to that. I am sure it has, how has it affected me, how has it affected you? Has it caused you to cry to God in thanksgiving that another took your place and bore the judgment that was justly due to you and me? Do you truly thank God every day that there was One who loved you and gave Himself for you? Blessed Jesus! I commend Him to you. Think of those persons dying in their sins.

You will die in your sins without Christ, you will die in your sins without the Saviour. You may fear God in a sense, you may believe in the Almighty, you may even reverence God, you may recognise that you will have to do with God, but dear friend there is One

mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus who gave Himself a ransom for all. That is the reality that we could never have to do with God on our own terms. Young people who have worked for me over the years think that their good works will outweigh their bad, they hope that they will win God's favour, that they will earn God's merit. Do you not feel your need of a Saviour, of Jesus? His is the alone Name that is given under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved (see Acts 4: 12). He is not just a prophet, He was not just a good Man, He was the Saviour of sinners, the blessed Mediator of God and men. It has been said that the world is like a theatre, that it is like a battleground, and there is man on the battleground. Satan wants to rob God of the souls of men, God in His glad tidings, in His mercy and grace is seeking to attract persons to His blessed Saviour, to Jesus. What has Satan got to attract you that will give you lasting peace? Nothing. There is nothing that this world can offer but there is a Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who once lay in death, who once suffered in our stead, who is on high now tonight, and He can give you peace with God and He is available for you. You are not excluded. Whatever you have done, however your conscience troubles you, Jesus is able to save completely those who approach by Him to God. Do not pass the message by, do not think that you can have to do with God on your own terms, when they may say peace and safety and then sudden destruction comes upon them.

I know these scriptures I have read are addressed to believers but I have read them as seeking to raise exercise with each one of us as to whether we are enjoying peace, whether we are enjoying present salvation, because that is what God wants us to be in the gain of. He wants us to be encouraged. He wants us to be those who are alert, alert as to His feelings and desires that He might have us for His pleasure. Are you here for His pleasure? We spoke a little in the reading as to the enjoyment of Christian fellowship and that involves the remembrance of the Lord with one another as we did this morning. Dear friend, I just bring that into the gospel, I think it is right to do so and remind you that the Lord Jesus

has a claim over you. No one has a claim like Him, a blessed incontestable claim and His desire in that claim, as asserting His rights as the blessed Redeemer who shed His blood for you, is that you might be here for Him and have a part in being here for Him. I believe what is involved in being here for Him is to begin each week as putting your hands to the loaf and the cup and remember Him and giving Him His rightful place. You will know when the time is right, the blessed timing of God is perfect. I think of the time when I was converted, maybe you can cast your mind back, perhaps you can remember a time when you wept for Jesus, when you shed tears for that blessed Lamb of God who in meekness and lowliness yielded to the will of God and laid down His life for you and for me.

May it sober us, may it cause us to be sober in the present time, but may it cause us to rejoice, rejoice in the knowledge that we have “peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ” as Paul brings out in Romans. We know these things, maybe we know them well that we have been justified on the principle of faith and that we have “peace towards God”. But I believe that the divine intent is that we should be in the present reality and enjoyment of these things that we might know that everything is settled, every liability met, everything settled. Where was it settled for you? You might say everything was settled when I was on my knees and I confessed my sins, I repented and I sought forgiveness and I know that I am forgiven. But do you know where everything was settled? It was settled at the cross of Calvary, for God the whole matter of sin has been met. Oh the greatness of Jesus! The greatness of the Christ, the Messiah of God that He alone was able to meet everything that stood out against man and the question tonight is whether you accept Him as your own sin bearer.

I read these scriptures that we might be refreshed and that God may have His portion that we might be those who are boasting, “boast in hope of the glory of God”. What does that involve? I believe it involves the anticipation of standing before God and giving an account of ourselves. That is what the scripture says we will have to do, each of us shall give an account of ourselves to God and

not only that but standing before the judgment seat of Christ and learning what it is to see everything in its place and everything according to God. Maybe there are questions hard to solve in your history. I might just bring in something as to that – I was speaking to someone close to me and there are things that cannot be undone, things that you might have to live with things or that I might have to live with, and you say how can I enjoy peace if I am having to live with the knowledge of things that I have done in the past and perhaps the effect that they have had? I heard an interesting thing said recently, God does not judge a person immediately they have died, He does not put them in hell, an unbeliever, because the effects of what they have done in their lives continue. Think of persons who have lived, wicked unbelieving persons and the effect of things that they have done in their lives continuing. So God's timing is perfect. He will usher in a day of judgment but that day has not arrived and the eternal day has not arrived yet. That is why we are here still and I believe that each of us is to recognise that everything that has happened, anything that is lingering on your mind, anything that is weighing you down, you need to take to Jesus. Take it to Him and He will bear it for you. He is the blessed bearer of burdens. Has He borne your burden? Have you found what it is to have a great release as you just cast your cares upon Him, because He cares about you?

The God of peace, we read about Him this morning, He desires and will see to it that those who have believed are "perfect ... in every good work to the doing of his will". Beloved friend, it is a good and acceptable and perfect will, that is the will of God. Your will and mine is a wicked will, it is marked by selfishness, the great contrast is the will of God, selflessness seen in Christ. Is He not attractive to you? The blessed One who shed His blood for you to redeem you to God, the sinless One, He is appealing to you tonight:

The person of the Christ,
Enfolding every grace (Hymn 132)

Think of it, He died, but He is alive tonight, He is alive for evermore and wants you to live and be in the enjoyment of life and in the

enjoyment of having to do with God and having God as a Father.

The Spirit would give you to know that peace tonight as you call upon God for mercy and grace and for His forgiveness, for His Spirit to indwell you. God would give you His Spirit that you might be in the present enjoyment of peace and rest and you can go on your way rejoicing. You can enjoy your life now, you can start the responsible week in the knowledge that everything is settled. Your name is written in the book of life, God is for you. May you be in the enjoyment of these things and have Jesus as your personal Saviour without whom there is no hope: you are lost without Christ. But God is appealing to you tonight in wondrous fresh mercy and grace that you might come; come to the supper spread, enjoy what He has prepared, what He has prepared for those who love Him. Has it entered into your hearts? I believe it has not fully entered into my heart what God has prepared for me. I love God and I trust you can say that tonight, that you love God, that He has first loved you and therefore you love Him. You love Jesus, you love the Father, you love the Spirit. What a blessed God, how He has delighted to make Himself known because He saw us before we were even born, saw us in all our need. As another has written:

He saw us ruined in the fall,
Yet loved us notwithstanding all (Hymn 107)

What a wonderful God we have to do with, He dwells in light unapproachable who no man has seen nor can see, but He has been fully revealed in Jesus Christ, in none other; the effulgence of God's glory and the expression of His substance. May you in faith afresh, if not for the first time, lay your hope upon Him. To God's glory and for His Name's sake.

WEST NORWOOD

23 October 2005