

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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GOD BRINGING THINGS TO AN ISSUE

F.E.Raven

John 3: 11-21, 31-36

I desire to bring before you the way that God has taken to bring everything on earth to an issue. This was bound to be the case. At the close of this chapter Jesus says "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him". All is thus brought to an issue; that is, on the one hand there is everlasting life, and on the other the wrath of God. This will become more manifest at the Lord's coming, but for us all is seen now. The Lord says "Now is the judgment of this world", John 12: 31. That really means that all is brought to an issue. He that believeth not is already condemned because he hath not believed in the name of the onlybegotten Son of God. His coming brought all to an issue as regards the Jew, for God had been going on with a nation which had certain national and religious privileges until the advent of the Son of God into the world. On the one hand eternal life was there in the Son of God, and on the other there was the wrath of God on the one not subject to the Son. This is exemplified at the present time in the Jews. They were not subject to the Son of God, and they are now under the wrath and curse of God. They are a byword to every nation in the world and they will not be nationally relieved of this until the coming of the Lord. The wrath of God is a reality here in the world.

I will speak first about the way God has taken to bring things to an issue. Light has come into the world and all are tested by it. We read in chapter 1: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (v 18). And in chapter 3: "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life".

And then is explained the secret of it all: "For God so loved the

world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". The Lord goes back to the source of it all in the love of God "God so loved" - but what was the position of man? Man was entirely away from God without any possibility of reaching Him. There is a very solemn word in Genesis: God "drove out the man" (chap 3: 24); he was under the sentence of death. He was driven out from the place that God frequented, with death upon him, and there was no possibility of his getting back to God.

All God's dealings recorded in the Old Testament with Abel, Enoch, Moses, David and others, were in view of Christ. So with Israel; nor could God have dealt with them as He did on any other ground. There was no power of recovery in man. The wisdom of God came in to establish in due time a point of contact where all men might touch God, for the truth was that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. The love of God was not a sentiment. He gave effect to it by establishing a point of contact available for every man.

The only-begotten Son is now the Head of every man, and God has given all things into His hand. But in order that this point of contact might be established He must take up men's liabilities; in other words, must accomplish redemption. Men crucified Him as a malefactor, but He was really lifted up vicariously that He might be available for all. He entered into all that lay on man by God's judgment. He gave Himself a ransom for all. The Jew was under the curse; all men were under death; Christ became the propitiation for the sins of the Jew, and not for theirs only but for the whole world. He was made a curse for the Jew and He died for all. He thus became the point of contact between God and men.

But God does not stop there. He speaks of the believer having everlasting life. I do not think one can have everlasting life at the present time without having entered the holiest. The reign of death has not yet come to an end outwardly; hence we do not have eternal life set forth publicly in the world. Christ is the true God and eternal life, and when the veil of providences is set aside in the coming age,

eternal life will be manifest. Christ will come out as the true God and eternal life. The present is the time for going in, and that is by the Spirit of God. He who does not go in now does not enter into privilege. In the time to come all blessing will depend on Christ coming out, but now our privilege is in going in. Where do you go into? You go into where Christ came from. He came from God's heart, for God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.

Not only is Christ a point of contact but it is our privilege and capability by the Spirit to enter into the secret of the love of God, to where Christ came from. The only way we can enter in is by the Spirit; we know the love of God by the Spirit's work in us, and so we can enter in by the new and living way. Entering the holiest means that Christ having come out and accomplished redemption, we can enter in to where He came from, and I do not think we learn the Son anywhere else. You may believe God's testimony and so touch God by faith in Christ, for the point of contact is touched by faith, but when the heart is so assured of divine love that you learn the truth of the Father's love to the Son, and the Son is known in that way, you have really reached eternal life. The Son is in the love of the Father. "He that hath the Son hath life". It is by reaching the Son in the love of the Father that man, by the Spirit's power, goes in to where Christ came from. We are entitled to enter and learn in that heart of love what God's resource is; that is, His beloved Son as the sent One.

He must be learned in the love of God. In the holiest of all there was the ark of the covenant and the mercy-seat. In the presence of this all distinction of Jew and Gentile vanished; the point of contact was available for "whosoever", and any one who touched that point of contact was able to enter and learn what Christ is in the Father's heart so that He can accomplish the purposes of His love. We have boldness to enter in, and boldness is connected with the knowledge of the love of God. There we come to eternal life. Christ is the Head of every man, and every man through Him may enter into the holy love of God. The position that had been is now changed. The truth now is, "God is one, and the mediator between God and men one,

the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all", 1 Tim 2: 5. That is very near akin to John 3, only that there we find the source in divine love. We want understanding in the wisdom of divine ways. I think it is happy to let everything connected with ourselves go, with all our frames and feelings, and go in to learn the infinite wisdom and love of divine ways.

Christ is made available in divine love for every man; nobody need be outside, anyone may avail himself of that point of contact and enter in. But all this light making known God's love could not have been found out by man, for what man by searching could find out God? Man's mind cannot rise above himself, but if God reveals Himself, the revelation becomes light to man. Christ came a light into the world. There was the revelation of what was in the heart of God for man.

Who could have told that God loved the world if God had not revealed it? The point where God is first learned is in the death of Christ. The full disclosure of God's heart came out when He was made known in self-sacrificing love. He is perfectly revealed in His disposition toward man. Light brings out the true character of everything, and God now intends to bring everything to an issue. He is effecting the complete disentanglement of good and evil. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil", 1 John 3: 8. Hence when light came into the world it was in the way of testimony, and thus so far good and evil were disentangled. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light". We need to apprehend things from that point of view; light has come in and is the test of every one. It became a test to the Jews; they refused the light. The revelation of God brings out the pride, independency, self-sufficiency and lawlessness of man. These came out on the part of the Jew. Christ was too lowly for them. They were lawless and selfsufficient, and therefore did not believe in Him. There are those who are attracted by the light, and those who hate it, and man is not disposed to give up his arrogance and self-sufficiency for the truth. All is brought to an issue in Christ; on the

one hand you get the greatest privilege and blessing - eternal life; on the other, man is exposed in the depths of his heart.

Now that Christ has come the mystery of lawlessness already works. Men stumble over the gospel in these days. But we have a perfect standard in Christ. We see meekness, gentleness, lowliness there, and by that standard can judge of man in his pride here. God brought in in Christ a perfect light by which everyone is judged, but men have loved darkness rather than light. If you accept the privilege of entering in, you learn what is in the heart of God, and then you understand the meaning of "as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4: 17) and we have boldness thus in the day of judgment, for perfect love casts out fear. Many think that they are saved from the day of judgment now by the gospel, but we are not saved from the day of judgment; we are assured regarding it by the love of God. Many Christians stop short of entering in, and if you do enter in, you discover the true character of things in the world, like the psalmist (see (Ps 73: 17) who could not understand until he went into the sanctuary; then he saw the true character of the world and the end of men in it.

Christ is the blessed standard by which everything is tested for God. The more we know the Son of God the more we know the character of things around us. God will in result refuse all that will not answer to the test, for all must be according to the holy love of God. We have our senses exercised to discern good and evil; this is in having Christ as a perfect divine standard. This is a step in God's ways which end in the complete disentanglement of good and evil.

We want to apply the test in passing through this world so that we may discern the true character of everything in it.

The Son is according to the Father's love, and there is everything in the Son to be loved. All that He is as Man is worthy to be loved. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life"; he is led by the Spirit into the heart of God. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him". The issue is brought about, and that may well be because God has been well pleased to bring in a perfect standard. In the believer's mind these

things are already brought to an issue as they will be in the ways of God in the long run.

BRIGHOUSE

29 July 1901

HE DOES ALL THINGS WELL

J.Lovie

Mark 5: 18-20, 32, 33, 41-43

I have been thinking a good deal as to Mark, and how he wrote his gospel as a man who was recovered. At one point he abandoned the work and took a path away from the path that Paul was moving on (see Acts 15: 38), but was restored Paul can say, "Take Mark, and bring him with thyself, for he is serviceable to me for ministry", 2 Tim 4: 11. He writes with a sense of urgency as if there is very little time left. He is writing, I think, with a deep sense, as Peter said, that for the rest of his time he will live to the will of God. Peter, like all of us, had many ups and downs. He said, "For the time past is sufficient for us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles", 1 Pet 4: 3.

The rest of our time for the will of God: what a happy thing it would be if we came to this resolve in our links with God, not a human resolve, but a resolve prompted by the activity of the Spirit of God! We have to-day; the rest of our time would be to-day.

Mark introduces his gospel with "Beginning of the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, Son of God". The Lord comes into public service immediately in Mark. The Spirit comes down and descends upon Him, and the word is "*Thou* art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight" (v 11). The Lord is personally addressed in Mark. The first thing that the Lord does is to call out certain persons. He begins with a few fishermen and they are mending their nets; this gospel has in view the great need of mending. The repair work is going on at the present time. What a mending time it is! and we need to continue with the repair work. Breaches need to be repaired. The Lord can do this personally, but then there is what the Lord does through ministry. Isaiah alludes to that: "and thou shalt be called, Repairer of the breaches, restorer of frequented paths", chap 58: 12. These fishermen are mending their nets. Mending, I think, is continually a feature of activity in local meetings; that is, to repair as if there had never been a break.

The Lord then proceeds to cast out an unclean spirit. I would like just to warn young people here as to the uncleanness that exists in this world, and as to the unclean literature and Satan's activities to get in through the mind through what is unclean and to damage the soul, if possible to destroy in the soul the *enjoyment* of the forgiveness of sins. The Lord casts out that unclean spirit. Then He deals with the feverish condition in Simon's house. All this is in chapter 1. What comes to light in this book is that "He does all things well; he makes both the deaf to hear, and the speechless to speak", chap 7: 37. He identifies Himself in grace with conditions of weakness and suffering in humanity with a view to their relief. The Lord is showing His disciples *how* He is doing things as if to impress them with the way He met conditions meeting the most difficult cases, meeting desperate conditions in humanity and doing it in grace. In this gospel, the Lord *touched* the leper: what that must have meant to Him! It meant that He had to die. It meant that He had to be forsaken of God. It meant that His soul was made an offering for sin. Who did that to Him? God did that to Him: "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin", Isa 53:10. He was made sin.

Then in chapter 3 of this gospel the Lord looks round in a circuit and says "Behold my mother and my brethren" (v 34). The synagogue is not sympathetic with what the Lord is doing. His relatives say He is out of His mind. "And looking around in a circuit... he says, Behold, my mother and my brethren: for whosoever shall do the will of God, *he* is my brother, and sister, and mother". In this gospel the Lord is securing brethren on moral grounds. John secures brethren on spiritual grounds, but in the synoptic gospels they are secured on moral lines.

Dear brethren, the testimony of our Lord is to be considered. It is to have weight and way with us. The Lord is not here now; He is in heaven, exalted, but His Name is here, and we gather to it. We hold that Name in renown and honour. It is dishonoured in this world; but as naming the name of the Lord we are identified with the testimony of our Lord, and the testimony of our Lord makes certain

demands upon us. He was taken by wicked hands and crucified and slain, and they would have given Him a malefactor's grave, but God saw to it that "he was with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither was there guile in his mouth" Isa 53: 9. I like to think of the answer to His moral worth in His burial and in His resurrection and ascension and exaltation in glory. He is exalted in heaven on the ground of moral excellence. Of course, He is there too in the right of who He is, because in coming into manhood He never ceased to be who He is because of what He became but was perfect in what He became. He was with the rich in His death; God gives the reason for it. How morally right it was for the Father to intervene and raise Him from among the dead in that selective resurrection, the glory of the Father intervening in the place of death and taking out from the millions who had died such moral excellence as was seen in Jesus! Think of His ascension on the ground of His moral worth! Heaven received Him. Hebrews says, 'saluted of God' (see chap 5: 10 note). He entered into heaven with salutation.

'Received in glory bright up there,
The Father's greetings, honours rare,
Are heaped upon His Son's blest brow;
He is the mighty Victor now'. (Hymn 350)

So the testimony of the Lord makes certain claims upon us, claims upon us as to what we do and where we go and with whom we associate, and many other things. The testimony of the Lord is not in honour in this world; it is despised; but Paul enjoins Timothy not to be ashamed of it (see 2 Tim 1: 8).

I read therefore, in chapter 5, as to these hard and difficult cases that came under the Lord's attention in this gospel.

'Disease, and death, and demon,
All fled before Thy word,
As darkness, the dominion
Of day's returning lord!' (Hymn 189)

He is healing the souls of men. When the Lord was here He healed their bodily needs, He raised the dead, He healed the sick, but He is

healing the souls of persons to-day. Here is a man who could not be subdued and he comes under the Lord's touch, and the Lord says to him "Go to thine home to thine own people, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for thee". What has the Lord Jesus done for you? Could you tell me some of the things that Jesus has done for you? Wonderful things He has done for us! Paul enlarges on the great things that have been done for us, what He has done, you might say, outside of ourselves altogether, what He has done for us when we could do nothing for ourselves. Can you go to school or to the office or go among your workmates and tell them what Jesus has done for you? Oh, that we could enlarge and expand in appreciation of the things that have been done for us! The blood is on the mercy-seat in its efficacy and power - a wonderful fact! The older we grow, the more we are to be steeped in the sense of the mercy of God that has wrought in the things that Jesus has done for us. This man went away and proclaimed in this place of ten cities "how great things Jesus had done for him; and all wondered". That woman in John 4 went to the men of the city; "Come, see a man" (v 29). She told them of some of the things that Jesus had done for her: "who told me all things I had ever done: is not he the Christ?" He is God's Anointed. Christ is the One who does things for God. He is not only doing things for the sinner, He is doing things for God. "Is not he the Christ?" It was not all for us. No. Much was for us, but what He has done for God! He has retrieved the race for God. God has a new Head for men in Christ because Christ restored what He took not away.

With this woman in Mark 5 it is what is done in her. It says, "But the woman, frightened and trembling, knowing what had taken place in her, came and fell down before him". Think of God's work going on inwardly in a soul. This might link with what we were speaking about in the reading, what is done in us. Colossians involves the work done in us. The epistle to the Romans is a good deal of what is done for us. There is more than that in it, of course, but in Colossians it is what is done in us: "your life is hid with the Christ in God", chap 3: 3. It is that hidden life, the inward side of

things that is being built up through contact with Christ - "buried with him... raised with him... quickened together with him" chap 2: 12,13. Quickening is an inward thought: what has been done in the soul.

The gift of the Spirit is an inward matter; He has been sent into our hearts; that is a great inward experience. Quickening involves the power of life in an inward way. It is life through contact with the Head in glory. How many believers are content just to go on with singing 'Happy day!' in the enjoyment of what has been done for them, and rejoicing in it, but who are not sufficiently exercised to proceed in relation to what God is prepared to do in them! The inward work involves the formative work of the Spirit. Genesis 1 is creation, God acting in His power in creation; chapter 2 involves formation, man being formed: involving the activity of the Spirit of God. Formation is by the Spirit. God has much to do in us on the line of formation. The Spirit will form more of Christ in our hearts if we give place to Him. Soon we are to be conformed to His image; the full condition proper to sonship will be realised when, with Christ in glory, in bodies of glory, we shall be like Him forever, and in that condition suited to having the Spirit eternally. Yet we have the Spirit now in this mixed condition in these bodies of humiliation, and the Spirit is pleased to identify Himself with us and come into our hearts with a view to formation in us in the divine nature. He sheds the love of God *abroad* in our hearts (see Rom 5: 5). This woman reaches it through power being transmitted from Christ, flowing into her, the Lord "knowing in himself the power that had gone out of him". It went out of Christ, but it went into this woman. This is the experience of contact with Christ. If we lose contact with Christ we lose interest in the meetings, we lose interest in the truth, but to be maintained in living contact with Christ involves that you are livingly identified with His body down here, the vehicle in which the Head is expressed. The body is descriptive of the Head in heaven; that is, life expressed through contact with Him who is our glorious Head above, and the more we enjoy that, the more we shall be found here among the saints in the support of His precious interests and finding formation is going on by the Spirit in view of completion. God will perfect His work in us; He will complete His work; He has begun a

good work in us and He will complete it unto Jesus Christ's day (see Phil 1: 6). Jesus Christ's day is the day of display, the day when it will shine. It does not shine in this world; it is hidden: "your life is hid with the Christ in God", Col 3: 3. Neighbours may see you going to the meeting; they may outwardly respect you; they do not quite understand you; you do not go here and there; you have no television or radio. Young people sometimes wonder why there is not a television in their home. It is because their parents do not want to have the world in their house. We do not need radios in our cars either; many of them come with them, but we can take them out, we can dispose of them. Our "life is hid with the Christ in God". When He who is our life shall appear, what a day that will be! when He who is our life above comes out in manifestation and display. We are not yet in the day of display; it is not the time of display. This world and its social ongoings is full of display. It marks man's day; man likes to display himself. But the present time is the *hidden* time: "and your life is hid with the Christ in God". Something had happened in the soul of this woman that had been imparted through contact with His garments. She had come into touch with what was representative of Him here. In Luke it is the "hem of his garment" (chap 8: 44), what is down here, and you find you can touch Christ in the local meeting; you can touch Him there; you can identify what is there as expressive of Christ, the Head in glory. The power that flows from Him into this woman is a wonderful experience; and we can be consciously affected by the impartation of life from Him who is our Head above.

Then this daughter of twelve years old: this chapter is so wonderful in the personnel that comes to light. It is house conditions, not synagogue conditions; synagogue conditions are unsympathetic; they are not helping the Lord in His service as Jehovah's servant. They do not understand who He is in chapter 4 when He rebuked the winds and the waves; "Who then is this...?" Who is this? God over all, blessed for ever, found here among men in that lowly path. It is the boat that the Lord is in that gets attacked. There are other ships but you do not hear anything of them. It is the

ship that the Lord is in that is seeming to be engulfed by the winds and the waves. In that chapter the Lord is the sower, but He is also viewed as a sleeper. Oh, to have confidence to leave things in the Lord's hands! Many things we may get burdened and anxious about. The disciples got excited in the boat but things were in the Lord's hands; we can leave things there and be restful when He is in charge. He is not in every boat but He is in this boat and Satan is attacking this boat where the Lord is.

The Lord raises up the damsel. He takes His disciples with Him at this point and shows them how He does things. Many times we set out to do something and we know it would be right to have it done, but one great lesson we need to learn, I believe, and keep learning, is *how* the Lord does things, the spirit in which He does them, the manifestation of divine grace in all He did in His way and walk here. Mr Darby says in that remarkable short article on the need for grace: 'man is not all conscience; the whip and the scourge may be righteous, there is no winning of the heart of man with these'. 'How often', he says, 'we may have hammered at the conscience with the heart ungained and maybe even unsought and the Master's lowly work so little done'. Oh to be affected by the *way* in which He did things. As to this girl, He says that something should be given her to eat. You find that in the local meetings; among the brethren you find food that is suitable. You do not need a Sunday school; "something should be given her to eat" - that is in our gatherings, there is the ministration of food to build up the soul constitutionally.

There is the development of normal 'house' conditions as the Lord has His place there. There is the man, the woman and the child in this chapter, and, you might say, there is the personnel in view of 'house' conditions over against the hardness and unbelief in the synagogue that is unsympathetic with the Lord's activities.

May the Lord help us in the development of maturity, in the formation of the divine nature as we make room for the Spirit of God, for soon we are to enter our eternal home in final conditions. I was thinking to-day of the word "as much as they can carry", Gen 44: 1.

How much love can we carry? What is our stock of love? What a

stock of love Paul had! How much he carried! May the Lord bless the word.

KILMARNOCK

28 June 1980

THE OPENED HEAVENS

F.C.Mutton

Luke 3: 21,22; Acts 7: 54-60; Malachi 3: 8-10; Revelation 11: 19

The impression before me, beloved brethren, is as to heaven being opened. We sang of that in our hymn (No 132): 'The heavens are opened now'. You could hardly speak of anything greater than that, that as a result of the work of Christ and His ascension, His ascending up where He was before, the heavens are opened. That is a magnificent thing, a surpassing thing. Alas, how often it may be one's gaze and occupation is earthbound. I am sure the word would come in as we have it so often in the Old Testament: "Lift up now thine eyes" (see Gen 13: 14). What a privilege, what a favour, what an outlet, that we can look into heaven and that the heavens are opened in view of the outpouring from heaven of its richest favour and blessing!

I feel the need of strengthening to refer for a moment to what was unique in the opening of the heavens upon Jesus. Never had such a thing happened before, because never before had there been an object of absolute complacency on earth upon which heaven could be opened. What a moment this was! the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, in manhood, having taken up that relationship of Son and that precious, hidden, secret life completed. What a life it was! The Father's voice says "In thee I have found my delight". We have a glimpse of that life at the age of twelve, a model for us all when we are young. I expect there are a good many here this afternoon who are about the age of twelve. That period of life round about that age is most important and significant, because you are growing up. You may feel, naturally, pleased with that. You are emerging from childhood and that gives a natural pleasure. I know a few boys and girls and it is natural to like to grow up, but let us grow up in relation to the Lord Jesus. He is the pattern at every age. I remember Mr Gardiner saying that if we are young we can think that the Lord Jesus has been our age. Is not that affecting? He has been the

exact age which you are, and at that age He was delightful to the Father. So we are to feed upon Him. As we were impressed earlier, everything springs from love to Christ.

I have a book by Thomas a Kempis, written many centuries ago, called 'The Imitation of Christ'. It is a depressing book because that dear man was trying to imitate Christ in his own power, and the more he tried the more miserable and self-condemned he felt. But if we know our Lord Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we love Him. Then the next great blessing is the reception of the Holy Spirit, giving us power to feed upon Him, to contemplate Him, to see Him in the Scriptures, to get impressions of Him in the meetings and in ministry. And as we feed upon Him we shall become like Him, and we shall never become like Him unless we feed upon Him, because what we feed upon forms us. Therefore may we all be warned against feeding on what is in the world in its corruption. We need more than ever to be warned against that, the corrupting influence of the world in its Sodom character.

But I have diverted. Here we have Jesus commencing His path of public service. It begins with what speaks of His committal, even to death, to the will of His God. That is what His baptism meant. How touching that is! At the very threshold of His public service was this action. "Jesus having been baptised and praying"; a holy, dependent, praying Man, His one object, His one motive, the Father's will; hence His prayer. He goes down into the waters of death in order that the will of God might be effected, because it could be effected in no other way, and that you and I who were in death, subject to its penalty and its power, might be gloriously emancipated to have part with Him beyond death in a character of things that is incorruptible, in a life that is related to His own by the Holy Spirit. "All the people having been baptised": in principle the whole race is seen as going down in death, and one Man comes out of it.

So it says "and Jesus having been baptised and praying... the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him; and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight". I would not attempt to

say much as to it. It is more for reverent, holy and worshipful contemplation. But let us contemplate it, let us feed upon it. For the first time here in public appearance, and anointed by the Holy Spirit, was an answer to the eternal divine pleasure, that God should have man for Himself. Here was the blest unfailing assurance that every divine purpose would be secured and established for time and eternity. But not only that; in this Person Himself there was all that which drew out the Father's infinite pleasure and delight, His active delight, involving His complacency, His rest: "*Thou* art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight". I would say, beloved, without any hesitation, that everything that is for the Father's pleasure must be of Christ's character. The baptism of all the people speaks of the removal of all else. Just as the flood was the removal of the whole order of things which was corrupt and stood condemned, so here baptism speaks of the removal of all that was offensive and all that challenged God, and the glorious bringing to light, in another Man out of death, of all that is for His infinite complacency.

As we come to Acts 7 we find a man, Stephen, to whom the heavens were opened. This brings us to the time in which we are.

This, of course, was something special, heaven's answer to the sacrificial testimony and faithfulness of this man who, in a devotion that bore the marks of his Master, was about to lay down his life in faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. In that sense, it was special, but in another sense beloved what Stephen saw is open for us to see so that we, like him, may derive from it comfort and power and strength and assurance to continue here in faithfulness in the light of the opened heavens and what is in them. What a moment this was! Stephen had rendered his testimony, a remarkable testimony in the power of the Holy Spirit and of the utmost encouragement to us, because it shows the answer to what the Lord said, "It shall be given to you in that hour what ye shall speak", Matt 10: 19. In this critical hour the Spirit enabled Stephen with accuracy and pungency to range over Old Testament history, binding it all together in a moral arrangement of irresistible power, and to bring it all up to date and lay it upon the consciences of the opposers, the haters of Christ, the

haters of His name. He says, "of whom ye have now become deliverers up and murderers!" (v 52).

What a servant he was! fearless, and in the spirit of his Master. Beloved, how important it is that we should be marked by being filled with the Holy Spirit. That was what marked Stephen. The Holy Spirit was completely unhindered in this man. May we be greatly and constantly concerned that that might be so with us, so that we may be delivered from all the lawless and unhelpful tendencies that we find in our own hearts, and kept under the power and control and direction of the Holy Spirit so as to be here in the spirit of Christ.

That involves with Stephen unerring, unflinching faithfulness, and yet the grace of Jesus as he says "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". What an extraordinary thing this was! Many of these same persons before whom Stephen was now arraigned had been involved in the condemnation of Jesus, and no doubt the enemy felt that he had successfully eradicated that name and that Person. But here it was again, not in Jesus personally, but in character in another man. They would say, This is Jesus over again. They could not deny it. Not of course that it could be the same. We must ever maintain the absolute uniqueness and pre-eminence of Jesus.

Nevertheless as they looked on Stephen they would say, We have seen this character of manhood before, we have seen this spirit before, we have felt the penetrating power of this word before. It was a man full of the Holy Spirit. Although Jesus was in heaven, there was a man here on earth representing Him faithfully. That is what the testimony is. We speak of the testimony; the testimony is that there are men and women here who in the power of the Holy Spirit are in the life and the spirit and the power of the exalted Man who was once here Himself.

There is what Stephen *saw* and then there is what he *said*, two separate things: "Being full of the Holy Spirit, having fixed his eyes on heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God". All this is full of its meaning for us, beloved brethren.

Let us in the power of the Holy Spirit fix our eyes on heaven. You may say, Well, it is difficult for me. It was rightly said recently that

when you retire you have more time and less distraction. But it is workable for us all. We can all seize a few minutes out of our busy lives to fix our eyes on heaven. Even as we go through the duties and pressures and responsibilities of our daily lives, in spirit we can be in touch with heaven, even momentarily. Our link with heaven is there all the time, but there are moments - let us make more of them - when in the power of the Spirit we can fix our eyes on heaven and see the glory of God and Jesus. We could not speak of anything greater than the glory of God, and nothing is so calculated to remove from us any sense of the imagined glory, the vain glory, of things below. The glory of God is infinitely, supremely, substantially eternal in its character. However we contemplate Him, the glory of His love, the magnificence of His purposes, the greatness of His power and wisdom, His mercy and grace, in all these things the glory of God is radiant. I would like to be more occupied with it. Stephen started with that: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham" (v 2). It got Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and it will get us out of the world. It will also get us, may I say, out of ourselves. As Abraham moved in relation to it, so may we, as having God before us.

"And Jesus standing at the right hand of God": no doubt that had its special bearing here, that even yet there were the divine lingerings over the nation. I think it means too. that Jesus was intensely concerned with His suffering servant. And He is concerned about you and me. Though at the right hand of God He is there on our behalf, all power committed to Him, and you and I are carried there in His affections and in His power. He is at our disposal in so many capacities, our High Priest, our intercessor, our great and supreme lover. "The glory of God, and Jesus": what a scene it is! glorious, altogether removed from this poor, passing scene; a sphere of stability, of glory and love. We are immediately connected with it in the power of the Holy Spirit. How sustaining this would be for Stephen! He does not say all this in testimony. The believer has a lot more in his soul than he says. It should always be like that. But Stephen said what was needed at this time: "I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God". Let

us testify in the power of what we are seeing and enjoying and there will be effectiveness in it.

All they could do with such a man was to cast him out and stone him, but he was superior to all. "They stoned Stephen, praying" - how like his Master, the praying Man of Luke's gospel - "and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit". Was not the Lord delighted to receive Stephen's spirit? That is all that will pass over into eternity in that sense, your spirit, what is formed according to Christ. It is a sobering thought; "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12: 23) the scripture says; that is, they were made perfect here in the ways of God, involving chastening and discipline. Let us be concerned about our spirits. Stephen here could say in the midst of the greatest provocation and burning hatred, as those stones were being hurled at him, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit". There was not a blemish upon his spirit, not a blemish of retaliation, resentment or complaint. I suppose he would be comparatively young, so able, so gifted, so spiritual, and his career of service was cut short. But how glorious! Christ had been magnified in that man. That was Paul's great objective. May it be ours! that whether in life or death Christ should be magnified in our bodies and our spirits as formed according to Him. Would not the Lord have delight in receiving this man's spirit? It is a very sobering question, Would the Lord at this moment have pleasure in receiving my spirit, or your spirit? Is there something on our spirit? If I may say so, if there is something between me and my brother or sister, I do not think the Lord would have unreserved pleasure in receiving my spirit.

These things are testing. They are not discouraging. Let us, if we are conscious of anything, get to the Lord and get things right.

But here was this beloved man who could just ask the Lord to receive his spirit and the Lord would have delighted to do that. "And kneeling down, he cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". How he was formed according to Christ! These were the breathings of the man himself. This was the outgoing of his soul. He did not want this sin laid to their charge, and he goes out in the moral glory of being like his Master in suffering. "And having said

this, he fell asleep". What a touching expression! Beyond their reach, taken care of by Jesus, peaceful, restful, he fell asleep.

Now I want to refer to the verse in Malachi. We do experience what is spoken of there. I am quite sure it has been experienced in this place this week, and I trust in all our localities, the windows of heaven being opened. But, as with all these things, there is room to experience it more. It was conditional here. There was a bad state with some, as the opening of this prophecy says. They were really defrauding God. For example, when they brought offerings they were bringing the lame and the sick. What was not of any use to anyone else they brought to God for sacrifice. You and I may do that; we may just give Him the bits and pieces of our time and our interest, most of it being spent on myself or my own circle of things and God just having what is left. That is not right. The challenge is, from Malachi, "Will a man rob God?". These are solemn things. We have been taken up in grace, but it is possible to rob God. Infinite divine expenditure has been incurred that we might belong to God.

As we had in the reading: "mine shall they be", Num 3: 13. God puts in His claim to us, not only as Creator but as Redeemer. Do not let us rob God. So the call here is, "Will a man rob God? But ye rob me. And ye say, Wherein do we rob thee? In tithes and heave-offerings... and me ye rob"; that is, they were not rendering to God what was due to Him, that great principle set out by our Lord Jesus, "Pay then what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God" (Matt 22: 21), a simple principle by which we should seek to regulate our lives, so that what should be rendered to God may be rendered to Him.

"Bring the whole tithe into the treasure-house, that there may be food in my house". Well, beloved, may we be concerned to do this. The withholding of it may take many forms. I may be careless as to my links with the Lord, as to personal habits in relation to prayer and reading and reflection. Another form it can take is that I may have something and I may withhold it. A young brother may be over-timid. For that reason the brethren are not getting the gain of what he has; he is withholding the tithe. You have an obligation that

what the Lord has given you is to be put into circulation, as He would indicate and as the Spirit would give grace and power, in the assembly. If you have something it is for the saints. It does not mean that you have to force it on them at the very first opportunity, but at least let us be available under the Lord's hand. We may otherwise be withholding the tithe. Maybe you are withholding your prayers. Perhaps we have given up praying as we should for our local brethren; perhaps we have given up exercise. Perhaps I expect the other brethren to run the reading; I am not putting my shoulder to the wheel. I am not bringing the whole tithe of committal.

"And prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I open not to you the windows of the heavens, and pour you out a blessing, till there be no place for it". What a promise! Oh may we overcome these reservations, these hindrances! And may we in the sobriety of love's committal commit ourselves to the Lord and to His people, to the truth, and to being available in whatever way the Lord would have us available, where He has set us, in the Spirit's power so that there is food in His house. Then we shall prove the windows of heaven being opened in a most abundant way. We do experience it and it is one of the most precious things in our lives as we come together for readings and ministry meetings, that something comes in out of heaven. It comes through the brethren but it is heavenly in character and freshness and it fills our hearts and sends us home thankful and rejoicing. You may say, It does not always happen.

Then that would turn us to the Lord, would it not?, in secret in exercise that the next time we come together the opened windows of heaven may be experienced in fuller measure. But they are open - wonderful fact of this dispensation! And it is up to you and me that in our moral and spiritual state we are such as to enter into the experience of the windows of heaven being opened and to contribute to the local experience of it.

At the end of Revelation 11, relating to a period after the church has been taken, God's ways unfold in the most solemn judgment and yet at many points we find companies secured, answering to the then testimony, for divine pleasure. Here at a moment of

extraordinary pressure, when the seventh angel has sounded his trumpet, it says "the temple of God in the heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple" - a view of heaven for the comfort of the faithful, suffering remnant. Although we live in a different and much more favoured time, this is to be experienced now. There are many pressures. We are not to be insensitive to what presses upon men in general, the spread of communism and many other threatening powers of lawlessness, strife and anarchy which to men may appear to offer a prospect that is appalling and hopeless. We are not to be unfeeling, and certainly our prayers should include these matters in a very specific way both personally and as we come together for assembly prayer. But, beloved, we have an outlet and we have an outlook. "The temple of God in the heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple". Christ is there! All is safe, all is assured, all is restful and peaceful there. The ark of His covenant is the assurance, as we remember that the tables of stone were there enshrined in the ark, that every thought of God for His own glory and in relation to His beloved people is going through to glorious finality. This would steady and stabilise us and keep us restful and peaceful, indeed worshipful. May it be so, for His Name's sake.

GRANGEMOUTH

19 January 1980

THE CHILDREN'S KING

Amongst the excellent titles of the Lord Jesus is that of "The great King". He was the only monarch to be born king. This fact caused some wise men, or Magi, from the east to take a dreary desert journey of six weeks or more so as to pay homage to Him. You will remember that the shepherds, simple folk and taken by surprise, were given detailed directions where to find the infant King. But to the wise men, who had evidently been expectant of His birth, was given a star - His star - for guidance. As to their gifts, the gold doubtless spoke of the fulness of the divinity of Jesus. The frankincense - so-called because it gives off its fragrance freely - looked forward to the perfection of His manhood in the sight of heaven and of those on earth who had eyes to see it. The myrrh, a fragrant gum given out in the form of tears by a plant of that name, must have foretold the sorrows and sufferings of Jesus.

Kings do not always wear their crowns! I remember seeing six kings walking with a number of presidents and chancellors, all bareheaded and without apparent protection in a London street. The occasion was the funeral procession of King George V. For the Christian believer, however, it is a constant privilege to see with the vision of faith "Jesus... crowned with glory and honour". The beginning of the epistle to the Hebrews displays to us other royal jewels also, such as the sceptre, or rod, of His upright sway and influence over His people. His throne is an eternal one and His enemies will be as a footstool of His feet. Though He was a man of sorrows here, His anointing was with the oil of gladness and His companions share His joy.

During the pathway of Jesus on earth there came a time when He entered Jerusalem to the acclaim of those who surrounded Him. His entry was a royal one, riding as a king upon an ass and her colt. This was a beautiful picture of the way in which the King claims both older and younger subjects. "The Lord has need of them" He had said. Some years ago an army General had to take possession of Jerusalem in the course of war. It is said that he would not do so

with his troops mounted but they would enter bare headed and on foot into the city out of which the Saviour had been led to His crucifixion. Do you rejoice in the crucified One as your King?

J.C.Evershed