

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 111

June 1982

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PRESENT RESULTS FROM THE DEATH OF CHRIST

Judges 14: 1-9, 14; 15: 8-20; 16: 22, 28-30

N.T.M. We have been taught that in Samson's history there are suggestions of church history in that there were moments of extraordinary power and victory and there were also moments of very real incongruity and weakness and failure. It would not be difficult for us to think of examples of each of those two sides; I suppose the Reformation was a moment of extraordinary victory and the power of it was overcoming in its character. Interwoven with the history and perhaps bearing on the working of recovery, there seem to be these references to the death of Christ - I am referring to the slaying of the lion and what came out of it, and the cleft of the cliff, and the jawbone of the ass. These are references to the Lord's death in some way and the power of the Spirit as flowing out of the rock which God clave. I thought they point to something which we might consider with profit as to the death of Jesus and the way in which, as it is rightly apprehended, it leads to revival and recovery.

As to the public position we have to say it is very mixed, even in our own day it has that character; nevertheless there is what goes through. The final public position, in chapter 16, is one of very great humiliation; you can hardly think of a more humiliating public spectacle than Samson there. Nevertheless there was some revival of power even in such days.

J.A.P. Would the Lord's supper coming in to the revival be a bright testimony to the death of Christ? "As often as ye shall eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye announce the death of the Lord, until he come", 1 Cor 11: 26.

N.T.M. I thought that. There is a suggestion of it in the fresh jawbone in that the Supper coming week by week is intended to be kept fresh with us, the Lord's death applied. It is not a once for all matter or a historical matter.

J.A.P. Would John's suggestion in chapter 20, "We have seen the Lord", be fresh?

N.T.M. That is good. It is a question whether we experience this freshness or whether we become jaded, whether it has in any sense lost its force with us whether we find this fresh jawbone every week and in every experience.

A.B.P. Were you connecting the fresh jawbone with the fact that the Supper was not only instituted by the Lord in the presence of His disciples but also Paul received the word from heaven?

N.T.M. I think that is helpful. We need it week by week in our own experience; we know what we shall lose if we miss the Supper, miss the breaking of bread, miss looking at the emblems and thinking about them, and finding the impact on us of the Lord's death here.

R.N.H. "Out of the eater came forth food": is that Christ, the food, and would that be for our reviving? Jesus said "My food is that I should do the will of him that has sent me", John 4: 34. Could we liken that to the eater, that Jesus fed on the will of God and as a result He became food for us?

N.T.M. There is that side to it; that is a very positive reference: "Out of the eater came forth food, And out of the strong came forth sweetness". I thought it was very encouraging that Samson's first experience was so positive. It is God's tenderness to us as young that He presents to us the death of Jesus in a positive sense, not exactly as limiting my movements here - it does have that effect - but rather as providing a peculiar character of sweetness and food for one's soul and affections.

A.S.H. What is to be learned from the lion roaring against him? Is that the enemy coming in? But then the Spirit of God shows Himself.

N.T.M. I think it is a reference to the death of Christ. Of course these types are never exact, are they? They are very rich in suggestion but I do not think they are exact; Mr Taylor said we should not read the Old Testament literally, otherwise we get into a good deal of confusion. I think it is a reference to the food for our affections that has been secured as a result of the Lord's death, and also the sweetness of fellowship in the mutual side, the fellowship as a result of the death of Christ. The honey was a mutual product. It

is a character of fellowship which is based on the death of Jesus and that is really the only fellowship that we should have part in. Any fellowship that is not based on the death of Jesus we should abhor.

It is a very positive reference and it is God's consideration for us as young believers; the death of Jesus has brought out this food of a sustaining and a satisfying character and also a very sweet character in the sense that links are formed together with fellow believers which are of a very sweet and unique kind.

S.E.MacC. "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him" (John 6: 56): I was thinking of the fellowship, and even as we are together as we are now enjoying these precious things with our brethren and with Christ, it tends to life, does it not?

N.T.M. That is good. I think it is a side we should go in for. I am sure that you in your isolated position would value it in a very real way.

G.H. That verse our brother referred to, "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him", is very deep. What does that mean?

N.T.M. I did think of that chapter; it is really the testing chapter of the Scriptures. There is clearly a reference to the Lord's death, and there is perhaps a side in it which is testing to us too because a good many left at this point; "This word is hard", they said. But there is a positive side also: "He also who eats me shall live also on account of me" (v 57). It is feeding on Christ as He is.

A.B.P. Would the fact that the flesh and the blood are referred to separately be a test as to how far we can penetrate into the apprehension of the fact that Jesus died?

N.T.M. I thought that. Perhaps you could say more about John 6 because it is a very deep chapter.

A.B.P. It is, and yet it is brought into such simple expression for us. It is an inscrutable matter. The very fact that the abandonment has become a point of conflict would be an indication that there is something the Lord would have us learn about it, even if it is just to

realise that there is an area into we cannot penetrate. How the Lord Jesus could lie in death and yet His spirit be in paradise: we touch an area of things that is beyond human calculation, do you not think?

N.T.M. I think so. I am sure it is a most important chapter. We do not do well to leave scriptures which we feel are beyond us; we do well to ponder them the more.

A.B.P. The very fact that the scripture is there would support what you are saying.

N.T.M. Yes. And are we not helped practically when we feel that the matter is beyond us in so far as we would more urgently call upon the Spirit and on divine help to open our understanding?

A.B.P. I was very much impressed by Mr Taylor's reference to what we speak of as the abandonment and also to hades. I noticed that he treads very lightly and covered his remarks by the awareness that we can only go so far in our thoughts.

N.T.M. Yes. The pondering of what was involved in the Lord's death, the closing up of such a life, is a very great matter for us. John 6 really becomes food for our souls.

T.E.D. Is it in the acceptance of His death that the believer gets power to move in the way of strength and victory in this scene?

N.T.M. I thought this history involved that, that as His death comes on to our view again we get power to rise out of the failure. The Lord's death is not entirely negative; it is negative in the sense that it really stops my doing certain things that I may wish to do naturally; His death has had to say to them, 'Thy cross has severed ties which bound us here' - that is one side of it. This first section that we read even bears on the way we look in relation to marriage. I know that God overruled it as it says, but should Samson's eyes have gone astray to a Philistine? He himself was a Nazarite: what an unequal yoke it would be! I thought divine tenderness was seen in this fact that the Lord virtually showed him that there was a fellowship operating in relation to His death, in the swarm of bees and the honey. There was something that could be enjoyed that was

according to God. The question of marriage is a very real matter, if we speak practically, when we think of young persons amongst us and especially in some parts of the world. Samson's affections went astray; we would have to say that; for a Nazarite to marry a Philistine was quite incongruous. But I thought the Lord in this chapter presented to Samson in type this character of His death so that if it stopped his looking in one direction it would open to his view another field.

O.L.L. What would you say about his mother and his father being exercised that the match was not right but that he did not heed their warnings?

N.T.M. That was good counsel. "She pleases me well", Samson said; and so what is naturally attractive can overcome us.

S.E.H. It goes on to say that "his father and his mother did not know that it was of Jehovah, that he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines". What would you say about that?

N.T.M. I thought it brought out that there is another side to it. This however does not absolve Samson from his own failure in the way his eyes went. We get this in church history; we even get something like it with Paul in the way he was set to go up to Jerusalem. You would be very slow to speak about it; no doubt the Lord's hand was over it in some way, and yet I think Mr Darby said that in those chapters we see that Paul dropped from the height of his calling.

J.A.P. You said that there are incongruous things; such may be even currently as to fellowship, yet the Lord may keep His hand over it. And is not the Lord's supper always in the setting of fellowship? The matter of fellowship is introduced in Corinth before Paul gives the Supper. Is there not to be a setting for the Supper?

N.T.M. Yes, the fellowship of His death. We can only have fellowship with what has come out of the death of Jesus.

G.T.McC. I thought that the reference to Samson's father and mother not knowing that it was of Jehovah, and then what you referred to in Paul, point out the ways of God. We would be very

slow to criticise Paul: nevertheless it was necessary that he should preach to kings and those in authority. I thought that though Samson dropped at this point, yet it was in the ways of Jehovah to bring out an attack against the Philistines.

N.T.M. So that often we have to wait patiently over matters to see that God may be working at two things at once. Very few of us can do two things at once but God can.

G.T.McC. It is Samson as an individual exercised in relation to destroying the Philistines because God had given the people into the hands of the Philistines for forty years and here is one person who is taking the initiative. I wondered therefore if the reference to the Lord's supper would not give us that initiative to overthrow the Philistine element.

N.T.M. The Lord has had to say to the Philistine in His death, the greatness of man and the mind of man, and as I apprehend the Supper and think of the Lord's death I shall have power to say to it too.

C.M. What would you say about Samson not telling his parents where he obtained the honey?

N.T.M. Perhaps there was a certain distance between him and them. I think confidence in parents is a great matter with young ones. They had said something to him and maybe distance had come in. Just as a practical matter, there is hardly anything more beautiful than to see children and young people confiding in their parents. There are few things more attractive in the Christian circle than to see that relationship. Isaac said "My father", he confided in his father. It may be in a mother, a link of confidence maintained.

A.B.P. There seems to be a development of the idea of keeping a secret; Samson failed in keeping this secret and he failed later in keeping the secret of his strength. There must be some point in that in this book.

N.T.M. I am sure there is. So the church disclosed her secret to the world.

A.B.P. The brethren of Jesus wanted Him to go up to the feast to make plain and public His service, but the Lord knew how to keep the secret. There is a distinction between things that we should say publicly in the way of testimony and things that we should hold as very intimately precious and secret, do you not think?

N.T.M. Yes. I suppose his secret in a sense was his Nazariteship, his devotion to Jehovah. Committal to Christ is the believer's secret.

T.E.D. What have you in mind as to the way the church has exposed her secret?

N.T.M. I was thinking of the way her devotion and her committal to Christ has been weakened by some form of alliance with the world.

The church as committed to Christ must be entirely separate from the world. The Nazarite was to be just for Jehovah. There came a point where the church put her trust in the world; I suppose historically it was in relation to Constantine. But the tendency for the church to leave that first state of things has continued ever since.

G.D.P. On the first day of the week the doors were shut for fear of the Jews - they were keeping the secret.

N.T.M. That is good. The idea of the hidden man of the heart is also something of this kind.

A.B.P. "Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col 3: 3): is that an area of things that you do not disclose publicly?

N.T.M. Oh to know it more, to know the depth of that secret!

A.B.P. Joshua was victorious when he adhered to this principle. In the beginning of the book the lesson was how to keep in ambush; you could hardly think of thirty thousand men in ambush and yet it began with Joshua being alone and spending the night in the valley. Our life being hid with Christ in God seems to underlie the approach to victory.

N.T.M. Yes, and not only held as a doctrine; our life is hid.

A.B.P. If it is only a doctrine we are miserable because there is something we know that is greater than what we are enjoying.

A.R.S. I was wondering if in the loaf (you spoke of food for our affections) we see in a peculiar way the thought that, although we might be few in number and very feeble, there are others that have been secured through the death of Christ, and that would afford us strength.

N.T.M. I am sure that is right; you look at the loaf unbroken and you think of the body of Christ in its intactness embracing every believer that has the Spirit in that small compass of the loaf. I think we should do that. There is a brother who breaks bread alone in an isolated part and someone said to him about being alone in the service of praise. Oh no, he said, we apprehend with all the saints.

That is later on in the service but I think there is a link with the beginning of the service too. As you look at the loaf in your affection you think of all the saints, you think of Christ's body in an entire way; then you break bread and you are thankful for those you can break bread with because it is an expression of fellowship, but as the service proceeds you are lifted out of the fewness of those you break bread with; and to apprehend with all the saints is a very fine experience, and in a sense you are back to the idea of the one loaf.

'Hark! ten thousand voices crying' (hymn 14): they were not all Plymouth Brethren voices were they? I do not think so. Mr Darby overheard it. We often think about that beloved man; probably more than any one he penetrated into those scenes of bliss.

A.B.P. Apparently in the institution of the Supper the Lord had in mind specifically His personal body, did He not? Is it right to have dominantly in our minds the loaf as typical of the corporate body? I am not saying we should not think of it but I am wondering if we should be more taken up with the apprehending of His body. Paul speaks about not distinguishing the body (see 1 Cor 11: 29), that is the personal body of Christ, is it not, that is represented in the loaf?

N.T.M. In verse 27 of that chapter it says: "So that whosoever shall eat the bread, or drink the cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty in respect of the body and of the blood of the Lord".

A.B.P. That would be His personal body.

N.T.M. It would seem so. "But let a man prove himself, and thus eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For the eater and drinker eats and drinks judgment to himself, not distinguishing the body". This setting does seem to be His personal body.

A.B.P. It is interesting that Luke should open up in such detail the conversation with the two on the way to Emmaus; the point they made was that they found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And as the narrative progresses Jesus Himself stood in their midst; the stress seems to be upon the Person.

N.T.M. Yes, that is interesting.

A.R.S. But it would not exclude the other side of the matter.

A.B.P. Oh no, that is the side of fellowship which is brought in in the tenth chapter.

J.A.P. Verse 29 might be a little more extensive, "distinguishing the body" involving the Lord's body but the extension of it too. In some sense we see things in the saints, do we not?

A.B.P. Certainly. But I am only asking the question as to which should be most dominant in our thoughts at the Supper.

G.T.McC. "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22: 19) would emphasise what is in your mind, but in Paul's ministry have we not been allowed to extend that to include all the saints to counteract anything that might bring in what is sectarian or exclusive to ourselves?

A.B.P. I fully recognise the representation in the loaf of the one body because that definitely relates to the fellowship, but should not our thoughts concentrate mainly on the Person?

G.T.McC. That would help us to see that the import of that occasion is the remembrance of the Lord Himself.

R.C.H. Does 1 Corinthians 10: 17 give a balanced view? It says, "Because we, being many, are one loaf, one body; for we all partake of that one loaf".

N.T.M. That clearly involves the saints. I always have thought, in looking at the loaf as it is on the table as we gather, that we should think of all the saints as in that body, all the saints who have the Spirit; but then you look round and see your local brethren and you thank God for them.

A.B.P. I think that it is good to safeguard what has been brought out, that we may have a balanced view of things, because actually the basis on which we are together is fellowship.

N.T.M. Yes it is, and that involves God's terms that He has made with us. But in giving thanks it is the Lord that we have come to remember; we do not exactly come to remember the fellowship although you cannot remember Him properly without it.

A.B.P. Unless we really merge into one corporate body we are just a congregation. I think the idea of the fellowship preceding the Supper, as has been remarked, is very important.

C.C.G. I think of the sufferings of the Lord, then of the loaf, and then of how many grains compose the loaf, so that we all blend together in order to give Him the praise and the glory and to be in unison with one another. Is that right?

N.T.M. Yes I think that is right. Then as the Lord comes in amongst us and some sense of His glory, some sense of the greatness of His work too and His Person, and His attractiveness, come before us it seems to me that in a certain sense the walls of the meeting room disappear. You think of the saints in New York or in Malvern (I am not saying you think of them specifically) and the idea of "with all the saints" comes in. "That ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints" (Eph 3: 18) is beyond the local setting, although you never cease to be thankful for those who are in the room with you.

A.B.P. Does "all the saints" refer to all who have been baptised by one Spirit into one body and are currently in the testimonial position? It would hardly include those who are with Christ. It is introduced by Paul into the section where he develops the service of praise.

N.T.M. That is what I was thinking.

J.A.P. As to the two matters in Judges 14 in what I may call poetic riddle, the first one is "Out of the eater came forth food, And out of the strong": that would be a definite reference to Christ, would it not? But the second one, the explanation, "What is sweeter than honey...?", is the extension of that in the saints. I think you said that it is the sweetness and the joy of fellowship, and that enters into this meeting too, does it not? We call this a fellowship meeting.

N.T.M. That is good. "What is sweeter than honey...?"; I think we should ask that in relation to the fellowship. It is the product of mutual working; the best readings are mutual readings, are they not?

J.A.P. Say what you mean please.

N.T.M. Someone might set something on; Mr Coates used to say, as to a meeting like this, that a brother might lay the egg but the brethren hatch it out.

A.B.P. I had not heard that before. I have heard of launching the boat and others helping to row it.

N.T.M. Well, we need to make way for one another in these meetings. Readings have had a very distinct place in the present recovery.

L.MacF. As to those at Pentecost, the sweetness bore testimony, what they were enjoying, became a public testimony, they did not call what they had their own. So the mutual side was in expression. The Spirit had His place.

N.T.M. I am sure that is so. The two things, sovereignty and mutuality, go along together - "part of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb", Luke 24: 42. Sovereignty should always be respected by us. But mutuality is in a certain sense the greater thing because gift and the sovereign side in the way of ability will cease but the mutual side goes through. What is sweeter, dear brethren, than honey?

S.E.MacC. It brightened Jonathan's eyes.

N.T.M. It did, yet someone wanted to prohibit it.

T.E.D. There is a purity in honey too. Would that link with "those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim 2: 22), the affections of the saints entering into it?

N.T.M. Yes I think so, there is a purity in it. Perhaps we hardly realise the potentialities of believers being together governed by the Lord's death, and making way for the Spirit; the character of conversation and enjoyment they have could be found nowhere else in the whole world. "What is sweeter than honey...?" We must see that it has come out of the death of Christ; it is the character of fellowship that has come from that root.

A.B.P. They gave him part of a honeycomb and of a broiled fish; it was something they had been experiencing and He would share with them.

N.T.M. Very good. "He took it and ate before them" it says. The Lord appropriates an occasion like this for His own joy too.

A.B.P. It is wonderful to think it may be so.

C.G. The statement "he shall begin to save Israel", chapter 13: 5 seemed to be prophetic of what was about to take place, but later it says "And he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years". At the beginning it did not state a length of time but that he would begin to do it. What is suggested in that?

N.T.M. I suppose it leads up to David; he completed it. Everything must lead up to Christ.

C.G. Would it also suggest the seriousness of making the Nazarite vow?

N.T.M. I am sure that is in it; he was selected and was to be devoted. So the church is to be devoted to One, committed to One.

And so am I. Is Christ my object? Is Christ my life? Are we referring to Him in everything like a faithful wife refers to her husband? I thought we get in the reference in verse 8 of chapter 15, "he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the cliff", another aspect of the Lord's death. 'Cleft for me' we often sing (hymn 396); that is the personal side bearing on our protection and salvation. I thought we should

not be long without referring to that, the fresh appreciation of what the Lord suffered, 'Cleft for me', because my attachment to Him is related to that, the freshness of it, the One who suffered for me.

C.G. That comes in early in Scripture: "And Jehovah said, Behold, there is a place by me: there shalt thou stand on the rock. And it shall come to pass, when my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand, until I have passed by", Exod 33: 21,22. Does that not suggest a sheltered place?

N.T.M. I think that is it, 'Cleft for me', a place of hiding, a place of shelter. Had Samson remained true to the Lord's death, he would not have failed as he did.

G.T.McC. Would it not therefore be our responsibility to make that clear to our young people in the preaching of the gospel that it is individual. Even though they are young they have to understand this principle of the cleft of the rock.

N.T.M. That is good. They need it as much as the out and out worldling - cleft for me.

A.B.P. God clave the hollow rock for Samson: is that what you have in mind?

N.T.M. I speak diffidently in a way about this because personally in God's ways we have no children, but I have often thought that the question of a child's conversion and receiving the Spirit must be very real exercises for parents.

G.T.McC. Actually it is a very critical thing because some of us as parents may take for granted that they will learn things in the meeting. But I think that the atmosphere of the home, whether related to children or grandchildren, should be always in a person's mind. Take Timothy and what Paul could refer to, his grandmother and his mother (see 2 Tim 1: 5): what influence they had over Timothy's young life!

N.T.M. I am glad you refer to that because that was a line I had just wondered about in thinking about the meeting this morning. "Thou

shalt impress them on thy sons" it says (Deut 6: 7) in relation to God's commandments, as if there is a certain duty laid on the parent not only to speak about the truth but to bring it home. I can say that my father did that to me and did not let me off. Sometimes I was more anxious for breakfast than for the morning reading. Keeping at the truth and bringing it home is a great matter that in principle enters into the parapet round the house (see Deut 22: 8).

G.T.McC. It says that Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob (see Heb 11: 9), so Jacob would have known some influence of Abraham and his experience. My own exercise is that we have tended, and perhaps we are tending, to leave things of this nature, the cleft of the rock, to general meetings amongst us but I think it is an intensely individual home matter.

N.T.M. It is indeed.

C.G. As to the responsibility of the parents, it says "Train up the child according to the tenor of his way, and when he is old he will not depart from it", Prov 22: 6. The note says 'Or at the entry'. So beginning early is very important, is it not?

N.T.M. I am sure that is so. It may have to be persisted in with most of us.

C.G. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is just" (Eph 6: 1); that is obedience to what is right according to God, is it not? - "in the Lord".

J.A.P. Have you something as to how Samson finished?

N.T.M. We get the cleft of the rock and then the way we are sustained by the caller's spring. That is a reference to the Spirit, keeping the death of Jesus fresh and living to me. But then this final phase is really abject shame in a public sense. Samson here, once so used, so great, so powerful at times in the testimony, carrying gates to the top of the mountain, tearing them up with the bar, is now blind, just an object of sport before the world. But there is this reference - something like the secret side of things - "But the hair of his head began to grow", and in Samson at least the whole world

system came down. A brother used to say about these two pillars that they are the mind of man and the will of man, two great matters that stand athwart the progress of the testimony. Samson overcame them.

A.B.P. Does John in his epistle add to that; "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life", 1 John 2: 16? Lust and pride might be the names of these two pillars also.

N.T.M. I am sure that is true. It is a question of this power of life. We were speaking about it in the house yesterday, and it seems to me that publicly the church finishes her testimony here and the public position remains one of ruin right till the rapture.

A.B.P. Does the growing of the hair indicate that what had been objective is now subjective? Is not that what the Lord is working for? What is objective was ministered in our city for years in purity - the good teaching - and we found through what happened later that we had it objectively but not subjectively. The Lord is putting us through pressures and trials to bring about a subjective answer to it.

N.T.M. I am sure there is a lot in that; very few of us found in recent years that we have been in the good and power of what we professed.

J.A.P. What do you say about this request that he die in this matter? He says "Let me die with the Philistines!"

N.T.M. I think he was prepared for it. It is this terrible principle that holds the saints in bondage and keeps them from the enjoyment of their inheritance. I wondered if it was his preparedness to accept death that this awful domination might be finished with. It is almost the teaching of death coming home to me, is it not?

L.MacF. I thought of the little power in Philadelphia, whether we see that in the hair growing. We should be content to go on with what is little as the testimony comes to a close, do you think?

N.T.M. I think so. Publicly we can afford to wait. It has always encouraged me that the Lord's vindication will come publicly and it

will be such a display of glory that this world has never witnessed.

We can afford to wait. It is a question whether there is anything morally being worked out in me now.

T.E.D. Are the exercises of 2 Timothy along this line? The rekindling and then the keeping of the Holy Spirit, and think of what I say, would be Paul's appeal amid the ruin to one so young but needed for the testimony.

N.T.M. Yes. There was that tendency to droop. Have you ever felt it? We know it, we are poor material. But is there a kindling of life, the hair growing? If you see it in young people it is a great matter. I think it is a tremendous encouragement to see the hair growing in young persons in this sense.

PLAINFIELD

2 January 1982

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A WIDOW WOMAN AND A BELIEVING WOMAN

N.T.Meek

1 Kings 16: 34; 17: 1-16 Acts 16: 1-3

I would like to say a word on the widow woman and the believing woman. The setting of chapter 17 of Kings immediately follows a reference to the rebuilding of the world system. However fine the rebuilt Jericho may have looked, possibly its walls even more imposing than they had been in Joshua's day, and however fine the

world system looks at the present time, the fact is that it is based on the death of persons. I suppose you would not see that as you looked superficially at the city, but it was founded on the moral death of persons, and if it was founded on that principle you could not expect anything but death in the city; and that really is the world. It may look impressive but there is present the negation of every right feeling, and the finish of everybody there would be that they would die. That is the world that we are in, a world that bears the stamp of death both morally and actually, and the latter is of course inevitable; no one can deny that death is in the world. Persons may seek to put it off but that is the stark fact, and the world will not go on for ever.

Revelation shows us the end of it and how quickly it will come.

Cities are built and rebuilt, they fall into decay and grander edifices rise in their place but death is ever there.

At the same time in the midst of Israel there is a famine. The testimony is weak. That is pretty much how it is now - whether it be the testimony of our Lord, the testimony of God, or the testimony of Jesus - I like that expression 'the testimony of Jesus'. The testimony of our Lord is military, I suppose, but the testimony of Jesus is the testimony to another kind of Man and it is a very peculiar character of testimony. I wonder if we render testimony to another kind of Man, not exactly One asserting His rights, although His rights go on to the end and will need to be maintained. The testimony of our Lord is military and powerful, but the testimony of Jesus is powerful too in its own way. It is powerful in what we might speak of as a hidden way, in a quiet way maybe, in persons who manifest the character of Jesus, who evidence another kind of Man walking in a world like this. There is to be known and to be developed in us such a thing as the testimony of Jesus.

The sustaining of the prophet here (who in a way represents the testimony) is by a person who is spoken of as a "widow woman". How often in Scripture we get the apparent unnecessary use of words, a 'widow' would have seemed sufficient; obviously it is a woman, but we get this word "a widow woman" as if to emphasise the thought of weakness; and that is what the thing has come to. I

have wondered - I just submit it to the brethren - whether the feeding of Elijah at the torrent by the ravens in a certain sense refers to God's providential actings, the way He may operate even using what is itself unclean to preserve the testimony. In the Reformation there may have been that kind of element that God used such as the secular power to sustain and provide some preservation of the testimony. It may have been mixed, it may have been political as church history tells us, the princes of Europe may have been partly political in their doings, but nevertheless God used them and the testimony was somehow sustained in a miraculous providential way. No one could explain why the ravens did not eat the food themselves, that is the kind of creature they are, but they brought him flesh, the word says. If you had given them breadcrumbs they may not have eaten them, but they actually brought flesh as though there was a holding back of their natural tendencies that the prophet might be preserved. I think there may have been such times in church history when that happened.

But the testimony now comes down to this idea of a widow woman, a person like you and me. Whilst you and I may be men, the feature of a widow woman should be with us, that is to say that outwardly there is weakness and we are made to feel it. Elijah finds this person and you can see how low things had reached and how depressed she had become, how her outlook was not really much different from the world; her outlook was that she would die. Of course actually if the Lord leaves us here we will die. When the Lord takes us I wonder what sort of impression we will have left amongst those we lived with. There is such a thing - the brethren know it well - as the after effects of the life of a godly person. Some persons live on; they die and are buried but what they were lives on. But this widow was still alive actually in flesh and blood here. In one sense, dear brethren, the testimony is committed to us and if we do not sustain it it might die out. That is not a bad way of thinking of things. There was a preacher who used to tell the Lord when he knelt down before the preaching that, no matter how well he preached, anything that was effected would be by the Lord Himself; that is true. But then

he said as to himself that he would like to preach as if it all depended on him; that is, he put all he had into it and he did not care just to present the truth without real feeling and appeal but as if it all depended on him and that if persons there who listened to his preaching were not converted it was his fault. But when he actually preached he told the audience that it all depended on them. And there is a grain of truth in all these three, that no one should speak - I say this carefully because we might have done it - without a sense of responsibility; but then neither should we listen without a sense of responsibility. So in one sense the testimony depends on you and me. If you had said to this woman ten days before that she was to be used to maintain the testimony, whether it was the testimony of our Lord or the testimony of the Christ or the testimony of Jesus, I suppose she probably would have ridiculed the suggestion that it depended on her, but the time came when it did. And in measure it does depend on you and on me. That is the way we are to think about it.

Then you may say that you have not much, and I suppose that in fact this meal in the barrel was not refined. It was not quite how Mr Taylor would have spoken of the scripture. You read the great ministries and you see the most refined and beautiful touches in them. Most of us feel we may have some impression but that it is comparatively coarse, it is like this meal. But there is such a thing as sensibilities which have developed in the saints which respond to refined and delicate touches of ministry. I suppose it would be one of the most powerful and wonderful services we could render to speak in such a way that the most delicate and sensitive matters are brought before the saints, especially the peculiar beauties and qualities of Christ. Most of us know He is our Saviour, but the Lord can be spoken of in ways (if only we had the ability) that brought out the most beautiful traits of His Person. I do not think this woman could quite do that. She is like most of us, perhaps all of us; we take the ground that what we have is just meal in a barrel. It is not to be despised, it is Christ anyway. And we are to use what we have and not despise what we have. If we take care of it we may find that

somehow some of that meal has turned into fine flour. And if you have my impression of the Lord, even if it is that He is your Saviour and that He suffered and died for you, you keep it, keep it safe. This woman kept it in a barrel. I suppose that the only way it could be reached was through the top; it was kept, it was preserved all around, it was preserved from the creatures that might have crawled underneath it. There was just room for her to get her hand down; she preserved what she had. Do not let us hold the truth lightly dear brethren, or anything we have; any impression we have let us cherish and we may find it becomes increasingly refined.

She is a widow woman and yet it says that the meal in the barrel did not waste. It says it twice. I like the way scripture affirms that the meal in the barrel did not waste, neither did the cruse of oil fail for a whole year, a year of days as if it went through the whole requirement. I wonder if that will be so this coming year. Is there enough to sustain the testimony for a year? We have to go day by day. This widow woman seems so weak, she seems so utterly helpless, but it goes through a whole year. And I think the Lord would encourage us with these impressions of Christ, and with the cruse of oil which no doubt would be a reference to the Spirit. These things do not fail. We may fail but these things do not fail. The question is whether we are so dependent - I suppose that is involved in the idea of the widow woman - that we cherish them so that by the end of the year we can say that the testimony has gone through.

Now in the Acts we have this reference, which again is rather strikingly put, to a "believing woman". It is referring to Timothy, that he was the son of a Jewish believing woman. Notice it does not say a Jewish believer or a Jewish woman; the inference is, I think, that characteristically she was believing. Now I find that a very great test; I do not know if you do. You say, I am a believer. Perhaps we are all believers. What do you believe in? I believe that Jesus died for me. That is good, that is worth believing in. You say, I believe that I have the gift of the Spirit. That is fine. I believe the Scriptures, I believe they are the word of God, I believe they provide for me a rule of life and God's word governs me, and if it is clearly in the Scriptures I am

prepared to submit myself to it. Well, that is saying a fair bit; I sometimes wonder whether we are all prepared to go that far. But I might be a believer in a nominal sense yet I may not be believing.

She was characteristically a believing woman. I am sure others have pointed this out - I am not saying anything new - that the nuances and the peculiar phrases that are sometimes used in Scripture were indited by the Spirit to convey something to us. And along with the idea of the widow woman, which is the idea of being so dependent and without outward support, runs this idea of the believing woman, that is a person who characteristically is believing, not just a nominal believer. I am sure we are all made to feel how nominal we tend to be; we are just prepared to be classified as a believer. But to be a believing person means that the thing is more than just in name, the actual quality is there - I am believing. "Be not unbelieving, but believing", John 20: 27.

Dear brethren, how unbelieving we can be in a thousand matters; even in relation to our own circumstances how unbelieving we can be! There is such a thing as being believing. The Lord would exhort us to be believing, to be hopeful, to look abroad upon young persons and upon localities with hope in the power of God and the Lord's power to bring His own way through. I know we may sorrow, we may wait; that is true too, but do not let us be unbelieving. The Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy (see Isa 59: 1). He hears every prayer that goes up about every assembly matter, every parent's cry for their children. Oh, that we might be believing in it! Surely the Lord is the same He is the same as when He was here; when person were brought to Him the Lord never failed to act. He will never fail to act for us, dear brethren. It may be it will be sorrow, it may be it will be pressure, it may be it will not be the way that we had hoped or thought, but the Lord will act. The Lord has never ceased to love His assembly and He has never ceased to love each one of His own - never. And this person was a believing woman and you can see that something went through in Timothy. Now let us be believing men and believing women. There are such I am sure there are. The way that the

testimony is maintained in places is evidence that there is an active believing attitude in the hearts and souls of many. Let it increase dear brethren, let it increase in my heart. The Lord said to Thomas - He has said it to you and to me - "Be not unbelieving, but believing". These features go along together. Outwardly the position is weak like the widow woman, but if I am believing, if there are believing men and believing women, the testimony will go through and the Lord will honour it. I think it would be right to say the Lord is bound to honour faith in Himself. May He encourage us in this way for His Name's sake.

PLAINFIELD

2 January 1982

THE TEMPLE

W.Dickson

2 Corinthians 6: 14-16; Luke 2: 25-32; 1 Samuel 2: 18; 3: 8,9

It is a blessing of inestimable value that as belonging to the Lord we can have the mind of God. It greatly simplifies the pathway of a believer, both individually and in his corporate links, to know that, in a world marked by chaotic conditions morally and men altogether unmindful as to the end of the course they are pursuing, a believer can have the mind of God. I sometimes wonder if we are tranquil enough or whether we are so restless and anxious to see that things are put into effect that we forget that the mind of God will ever be available to His people as certain conditions of a moral character exist amongst them.

I wanted to draw from these three scriptures. The one point of similarity that marks them is the temple. I think most of the brethren will recall in Psalm 27 that it was the desire of the psalmist to see the beauty of Jehovah and inquire in His temple (see v 4). I understand that the beauty of Jehovah which is spoken of in that psalm is the ark. There is nothing more blessed to a believer than to go into the presence of Jehovah and see the beauty of Jehovah, to see the Ark, to see Jesus in all His perfection and blessedness filling the heart of God in all that he accomplished, in all that He will yet bring to pass, a Man of unique moral greatness - the beauty of Jehovah. To inquire in His temple would be a spiritual confirmation of the fact that the mind of God is largely ascertained in the temple although it would be possible for a believer to have the mind of God through prayer and approach to God.

I started with 2 Corinthians 6 so that our hearts can be uplifted with the dignity of the thought that we are "the living God's temple". How it would enhance our view of our local gatherings if we thought of them that way! We might say we are just very few in number not marked by any religious distinction in the world, we have not been to the theological college to get our training, and yet the mind of God

can be secured in a locality. There would be no need to go to the university professor and say that a certain matter has cropped up, what did St Augustine say about it? what did Clement say about it? what did the old fathers say about it? No, we have the features of the temple of the living God and we can get help in the Scriptures. How often as in the temple the living touch comes in as to the mind of God as we are together in right moral state. Now what the apostle calls attention to in this passage is the need for a right moral state in the local company if the experience of the temple of the living God is to be known. By the Spirit there are certain conditions required for obtaining the mind of God in our localities. It has been said that the accredited ministry has largely come out in the temple. Very little of it was written in article form. Yet we have the same Spirit of God; we perhaps have not the outstanding gift in teaching that the Lord graciously granted in that period, but the Spirit of God is here, and the temple of the living God, and we should be profoundly exercised, beloved brethren, as to the necessary conditions.

Now what the apostle calls attention to in this passage is how mixture militates against the functioning of the living God's temple.

The Spirit would insist on a right subjective state amongst the brethren if the truth in a positive way is to flow forth, and we should be very seriously concerned as to anything that would involve a holding back of divine light. You might say, We do not allow diverse yokes; unrighteousness and lawlessness are not current amongst us, or idolatry. But what Paul brings out is that the principle of mixture hinders the operation of the temple. And I would question very much if we will get the Lord's current mind in regard to many matters that exercise us until we provide an environment in which the Spirit of God can function. How delightful to have Him with us, the living God who by His Spirit continually engages us with His glorious thoughts, His counsels, His purposes, His thoughts about Christ! "I rejoiced when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of Jehovah", Ps 122: 1. Did your heart not thrill that there was a fellowship meeting today? Did you not gladly leave everything else and go up to the living God 's temple? Just to hear a debate? No; to

have our hearts moved with the glory of divine thoughts and how they have embraced us in sovereign grace. How often we have had to judge our histories! but think of that mercy that has brought us again into an environment so rich. Let us be exercised to provide these spiritual conditions in which the living God can dwell among us and walk among us. Think of God walking amongst us! The thought of God walking is that God wants to commune with His people. He will dwell and commune with His people. Surely we would be exercised not to allow any mixture so that God would have to say, I am not free to commune because the conditions are not there for Me.

In Luke's gospel one was thinking of this beautiful scene in the temple. There was this man Simeon; note the reference to his moral state, that he was just and pious, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. I would appeal to the brethren that there may be more simple piety amongst us. These are the conditions in which the light of God and the mind of God can come to us. It was not the chief rabbi or the high priest who went into the temple, it was a just and pious man. How his heart must have been cheered as he saw Joseph and Mary bringing that Child up! In the Jewish economy it was not obligatory to bring the child up to the actual temple at Jerusalem, but Joseph and Mary would say, Where better could He be. Where better could our children be, beloved brethren, than in the temple and get a blessing from the hands of a Simeon? Oh, the formation in this man! He was an assembly man too. I can think of some asking, What is an assembly man? An assembly man is one for whom Christ's chief interest is his chief interest. I know you have other interests, you have your family, you have your business, but an assembly man has Christ's chief interest as his interest. Here Simeon was in Jerusalem, right in the centre of things, ready to receive divine communications. That glorious day when Jesus Himself was brought in by His parents into the temple, Simeon had the mind of God regarding the greatest matter in the universe, the incoming of the blessed Son of God. Simeon despite his age was not crystallised. The danger with us older persons is

getting crystallised, to think we have heard it all and nothing fresh can come. Do you think Simeon would be awkward as he held that Babe in his arms? No! his heart would be filled with reverent, tender feelings as having light from God as to the glory of that Babe.

Beloved brethren, do we come to the meeting like that? Do we realise the sanctified sphere in which we are, the temple of the living God, having to do with holy things, having to do with what is most choice? People say that this world is morally very bad, but the world morally today is no worse than the day in which Christ was crucified. It is just the same, and all of us should value the blessedness of a sanctified sphere where in holy intimacy we can take up the choicest thoughts of God that have come to us in that Babe, the Person of Jesus. It says "And it was divinely communicated to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ". I have often wondered if that was possible, that the Lord would tell an older brother or an older sister when they are going to die. Think of being so near the Lord that you could get a divine communication from Him as to when you are going to die and the circumstances under which you are going to die! How good to have that touch, the living touch from God that He can speak and tell us these holy secrets in regard to His own thoughts about Christ and ourselves. Thus there is much that we can have by the Spirit in this sanctified area of the temple. Perhaps some evening the Spirit of the living God will set something in motion, something perhaps that you have never heard before - despite all you have read you have never heard it before - the Spirit of the living God imparting a divine communication.

I wish now to speak of Samuel. I have chosen Samuel because having spoken about an old man I want to speak about a young man. It is possible for a young lad to get the mind of God.

That is very fine. It says Samuel was clothed with a linen ephod.

Now dear young brethren, have you a linen ephod in your wardrobe? I think that what it refers to is a habitual practice of prayer. Younger brethren that have a desire to continue with the Lord's people and get divine communications should value the linen

ephod in a habitual addiction to prayer, particularly in regard to the Lord's interests in the place where they are set. Then as Samuel went up to the temple it says in verse 3 of chapter 3 that he lay in the temple of Jehovah where the ark of God was. He would see, according to Psalm 27, the beauty of Jehovah. As that lad Samuel looked at that ark he would think about it. How it would convey to him the faithfulness of God. All around him was moral chaos; the priesthood had broken down, the people were in disarray, and as he lay every night in the temple he would look at that ark and would say, God is faithful. He would desire to be the recipient of a divine communication so that he could serve God's people. He was honoured of God as bringing in that great type of Jesus, king David. What must have filled his heart! If you had asked Samuel at the close of his life, What was the highlight of your career? Was it these prophetic words that thundered through Israel, made them all listen? No, he would say, the highlight of my career was that day when I anointed David.

Oh, beloved brethren, what a man Samuel was! and he began as a boy clothed with a linen ephod; he knew how to pray habitually. He lay down near the ark; he had tender feelings about it all; he had that message from Jehovah and he was obedient. This brings out another moral feature and that is the great importance of subject minds in receiving the divine communications. We may pride ourselves that we have a critical mind, and say, I would not let anything pass. It is right to have a critical mind; Paul says "let the others judge" (1 Cor 14: 29); but also we have to have subject minds and make sure that the critical mind does not overshadow the subject mind; but in the combination of the two you get the divine communication. This lad was nurtured by his mother. Many a godly mother has had desires for her son, not in relation to this world but in relation to the testimony of God, and God has honoured them. Dear sisters, if you are like Hannah, if you have that outlook and that desire, God is faithful and He will honour it. Who knows but in this very place, so richly endowed, God will raise up a teaching priest

able to convey the mind of God to His people in a current way and to act as a great strengthening in the face of what the enemy might do?

So beloved brethren, let us be exercised to provide the moral conditions in the temple by which the living God can speak to us in His word. For His Name's sake.

NEW YORK

9 May 1981

THE CHILDREN AS VESSELS

The glad tidings may be seen in one way as a search for vessels, both to be filled and also for pouring out. As Gentile believers we are especially "vessels of mercy... prepared for glory, us, whom he has also called". As such we are able in our measure to hold for enjoyment and for witness the riches of God's glory. It is by answering to the call by name that the believer as a vessel is found and brought into use. Thus it was with Abram, a mature man, who was called by the God of glory but also with Samuel, a teenager, to whom so much was entrusted. What treasure of the knowledge of God they and many others had - and do have - in their earthen vessels!

As fore-shadowed in Elisha's ministry there is now also a search for vessels to be filled with the Holy Spirit - "Bring me yet a vessel". In recent weeks we have heard of young believers desiring and receiving the Spirit. Every reader, however young, of these pages should be much concerned as to this and should pray to the Father about it. God gives His Spirit to those who are obedient so that it is first of all necessary to know and confess Jesus as Lord.

Then the fruit of the dwelling within of the Spirit shows itself in a variety of ways - just as there are many varieties of each dessert fruit that we know. One sign of His presence is love for our fellow-believers, others are joy in the Lord and witness for Him, being able to tell better the difference between right and wrong and cleaving to what is good. When young I related to the Holy Spirit the fact that at meetings of the saints, or otherwise in company with those who had the Spirit I found that I understood and enjoyed the Lord's things better.

From household or private reading in the book of Ezra the older children may remember the mention of "two vessels of shining copper, precious as gold". These were brought back by returning captives and were to be used in the service of worship and praise to God. Copper is often connected in Scripture with suffering, as in the altar of sacrifice, and those shining vessels are like Christians who

keep 'bright' even through great trials. Every believing school-child must feel in some way the reproach of confessing Jesus as Lord; some young ones may be more or less handicapped for life; others may be in very trying circumstances. Yet heaven observes all these things and also sees the brightness of spirit which reflects its own provision of needed grace. The captive maid in the house of Naaman is a good example of this. What about you and me?

J.C.Evershed