

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 110

May 1982

Contents

STABILITY

"OUR NOTHINGNESS"

PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

CHILDREN AS LIGHT-BEARERS

STABILITY

Isaiah 33: 5,6; 1 Timothy 3: 14,15; Acts 13: 1-3; Genes is 18: 1

F.C.M. The suggestion in reading these scriptures is that we should consider the matter of stability. Isaiah 33 clearly alludes to stability in Christ and what He is to be to us; "he shall be the stability of thy times". Certainly that would apply to us, that He is to be the stability of our times. Then in the passage in Timothy it is stability in the assembly which is "the pillar and base of the truth". In Acts 13 there is stability in a local assembly, and there is to be stability in local assemblies. We see the features that made Antioch a stable meeting. Then finally in Genesis we see a stable man, a stable household, Abraham by the oaks of Mamre. I wondered, therefore, if the Lord would help us, as He does help in the temple in enquiry, because we are meant to be in a state of stability in contrast to what is around us. We read a day or two ago about a government being overthrown by one vote in Parliament; that is not stability. God brings us into a realm of divine stability and steadiness, control and order, and confidence too, and that all centres in Christ.

R.L. Paul says, "be firm, immovable" (1 Cor 15: 58); he would strengthen the saints to be firm, would he not? That would be in relation to all that we have to face in relation to opposition.

F.C.M. Yes. It is a great thing, and it should be increasingly real to us, that we are in an area of stability. "And he shall be the stability of thy times": what a blessed thing that is! If one could put it this way: every office in the divine order of things is filled by Christ. He is the Redeemer; He has been made Lord and Christ; He is the Head of the assembly; He is the Mediator, Minister of holy places; every office you can think of is filled by Christ; therefore it is a stable system, vested in Him. He is the foundation stone; the Head of the corner; therefore if we are rightly in relation to Christ we shall experience and have part in an area of stability.

F.M.K. Is Isaiah speaking from experience? Would his experience according to chapter 6 be the basis of strength for him, stability for

the man himself? He saw the Lord high and lifted up.

F.C.M. Yes; it says there, "In the year of the death of king Uzziah" (v 1); he was a dreadful element of instability and God came in judicially. "I saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple". What an impression of stability he would have gained from that!

F.M.K. Isaiah was in troublous and testing times but he was held by that.

F.C.M. Quite so. I think that is a very helpful reference. "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up"; the footnote says 'the Lord was high' - that is the dominance of Christ - "and his train filled the temple"; therefore it was exclusively filled by what relates to Christ and His glory. His train would be those who follow Him.

Isaiah, as we have all experienced, felt his complete unsuitability and there was the means available in the glowing coal from the altar to bring in cleansing. So he would become part of this stable system and usable in relation to it.

E.P. It says "Jehovah is exalted; for he dwelleth on high". I was thinking of the link with chapter 6 - he saw Jehovah "high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple". 1 Corinthians 1 speaks of what there is in Christ Jesus and that He has been made unto us wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption. What would you say about that?

F.C.M. One of the names of God in the Old Testament is 'the Most High', and I think these divine titles link with what you speak of: "Jehovah is exalted; for he dwelleth on high", and here in Isaiah; "high and lifted up". I think we do need a sobering, controlling impression of the supremacy and exaltation of Christ. How small we are, but He is high, highly exalted - "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name", Phil 2: 9. May we be lowly and easily regulated by the One who is supremely exalted, and in whom, as you say, is our every resource.

E.P. It says in that Corinthian scripture: "But of him - that is of God, I suppose - "are ye in Christ Jesus"; the 'ye' is emphatic. So it looks as if this is to be worked out among the saints in a substantial way.

F.C.M. Yes exactly, so that something of the stability that we see in Christ is to be formed in us. We had a word the other evening in 2 Corinthians 1: 21; "Now he that establishes us with you in Christ"; that is stability.

F.G.M. James speaks of one who is unstable in all his ways (see chap 1: 8); it seems to be caused by doubt. That is just the opposite to what you are speaking of.

F.C.M. Quite so. I think the simple acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord, and submission to Him, would make us stable and cure us of the instability which so easily marks us.

J.W. Would the exaltation of Christ not only be because of who He is but what He is morally? I was thinking of the reference to "he hath filled Zion with justice and righteousness".

F.C.M. I think that is most important. These are the elements of stability. You cannot have stability with injustice and unrighteousness. What a wonderful thing! "he hath filled Zion with justice and righteousness"; therefore you have stable conditions. As you say, that is the moral influence of Christ pervading.

E.M.W. Is it good to see that every official position that Jesus has He is morally equal to? Would you think that the Holy Spirit would enter into this to help us in stability? Having been exalted by the right hand of God He has poured forth this which ye behold and hear (see Acts 2: 33).

F.C.M. I am sure that must be right. He has poured forth this which ye now behold and hear; that is, it was manifest in persons in powerful testimony because they were now related to this realm of justice and righteousness. I am sure, as you say, that the Spirit's service would be to impart to us and form in us what corresponds to the One who is exalted and who is to be the stability of our times. It impresses me very much that *stability must relate to justice and*

righteousness; that is, the maintenance among us in the assembly of what is according to God in these great and unvarying divine principles. Also it speaks in verse 6 of "the riches of salvation, wisdom and knowledge: the fear of Jehovah shall be your treasure". I can at least see, as something objective, that where these things pervade there is bound to be an area of stability.

D.G.S. In Revelation 4 it says "a throne stood in the heaven" (v 2), but around that throne was a rainbow. Does that rainbow remind us that at one time God had to come in in righteousness and judgment, and yet He still considers for men extensively from the throne?

F.C.M. It would be well to have that scripture before us: "behold, a throne stood in the heaven, and upon the throne one sitting, and he that was sitting like in appearance to a stone of jasper and a sardius, and a rainbow round the throne like in appearance to an emerald".

And then there were those who were around the throne: twenty-four thrones, twenty-four elders, and then the living creatures. I think all this helps us very much. The rainbow would certainly be a testimony to God's faithfulness; it would also be the display of His attributes.

Think of the colours in the rainbow that the young people deal with in physics at school, the component colours! They all speak of divine glories. We used to sing a hymn:

'The glories that compose Thy name
Standing engaged to make us blest'.

This throne is consistent with all that God is, and then there are persons round it; and I think we could say simply, in applying it, that we would like to be like these elders and living creatures who are entirely related to the throne. Now if you have that you have stability.

S.D.K.R. Is your thought that, as we take account of instability in the testimony, if we can get our eyes on what is really stable it will strengthen us? I was thinking of that verse in Psalm 48: "As we have heard, so have we seen, in the city of Jehovah of hosts, in the city of our God: God doth establish it for ever. Selah" (v 8). Do we take character from what we are occupied with?

F.C.M. I am sure that is so. That is one of the psalms of the sons of Korah; it speaks of the beauty and elevation of mount Zion, and then as you say, "As we have heard, so have we seen". So may Christ be before us. Do you not think that one of the greatest things is to be lifted out of what is personal, and any other consideration, to be simply related to Christ, the authority which is in Him, and the moral excellence that we see in Him, so that, as has been said, by the Spirit we might thus be regulated.

F.M.K. Would the Spirit bring about this appreciation of the treasure? "The fear of Jehovah shall be your treasure"; that is something worked out, is it not, with us that we value?

F.C.M. Very good. What a privilege! What a treasure it is to be brought into this area, delivered from instability and confusion and brought into the simple principle of regulation by Christ.

In Timothy we have what corresponds to the stability seen in Christ. The assembly is spoken of here in this very profound way as God's house, the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. Now there is nothing unstable, nothing wobbly, nothing uncertain here; there is stability in a vessel which, as the pillar, sets out attractively in an adorned way the truth, and also supports it; there is moral formation which sustains the truth. So we have stability in Christ uniquely, but then stability in the assembly,

A.T. Is that seen worked out in faithful persons? I was thinking of Timothy himself, how faithful he was. In faithful persons there is something to cling to and build upon.

F.C.M. Yes, such persons would form part of this structure; it exists. I may be conscious of unfaithfulness but there is something that exists, divinely established, which is the pillar and base of the truth.

Now I would like to have part in it; I would like to be among the faithful men who experience, and contribute to, the reality of it.

R.L. Would the fact that He is spoken of as the living God be something for us? Living conditions are to mark us.

F.C.M. Yes, exactly,

P.S.W. Do sovereignty and responsibility enter into this matter of stability? I was thinking of the sovereign revelation to Peter, that "on this rock I will build my assembly" (Matt 16: 18), but then in Nehemiah's day there was responsibility to clear away the rubbish so that what was stable and firm in the wall could be brought to light.

F.C.M. Yes, I am sure those two things always go on together.

Peter was the subject of the Father's revelation, but a lot of work had to go on with Peter, as with each of us, to bring him into the gain of what had been objectively disclosed to him.

B.W.W. In that connection the last words to him in John's gospel are "Follow thou me" (chap 21: 23). which would link, if I have followed you aright, with what you said as to the place that Christ should have before each of us.

F.C.M. Exactly. It is always a challenging question: *whom am I following?* It is so easy, with the best of intentions, to have a person before me. It may be somebody I like, it might be somebody I do not like. *Follow thou Me:* in no other say, so far as I can see, can we be preserved in the testimony and in relation to this stable order of things.

V.E.W. In Matthew, the assembly gospel, we get the prudent man who, in the words of the Lord Jesus, "hears these my words and does them". He builds his house upon the rock (see chap 7: 24).

Do we not by the Spirit need to pay attention to the Lord's words?

F.C.M. Yes, very good, and to do them; the doing is the test, and you dig down and reach what is stable, and that is really Christ. You have removed all the rubbish and other extraneous things out of the way and reached what is rock-like.

J.W. Is stability connected with what is of God and not with what is of man? There is the reference to the house of God and the assembly of the living God.

F.C.M. Yes, I think that is the whole point. It is God's house, the assembly of the living God, divine property. If I may speak simply, if I went into somebody else's house I would not begin moving the

furniture around; I would not say, This should be there, and that should be somewhere else. It is his house. And this is God's house, not ours, and all is subject to His rights and His glory, His will and pleasure. Nothing could be so beautifully arranged as things are in His house, the assembly of the living God. Therefore I am sure we need to be there with intense reverence and godly fear, yet in holy and affectionate liberty, for Luke 15 tells us the kind of house that this is.

H.J.T. Do some references in Psalm 48, already referred to, link with this scripture? "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: count the towers thereof; Mark ye well her bulwarks", or 'Set your heart on' her bulwarks. Would it fit in with what you are bringing before us, that we should take account of what really belongs to the assembly, its character in that way?

F.C.M. Yes, I think that. It is very healthy to look at things objectively first of all. Now this is the character of God's house and the assembly of the living God; let us have a walk round it and see its strength, its stability and its beauty. Someone might have to say, I wish my local meeting was like that. But at least let us have the objective before us, that there is such a thing, the house of God, the assembly of the living God. You could not think of more privileged and dignified expressions.

A.T. So where your treasure is, there will be your heart. I was thinking of what we read in Isaiah as to the treasure; how important that is. If we really see that Christ is everything, what do things here mean? We get other men in view and that robs our souls, robs our affections.

F.C.M. Yes. So we get this expression "but if I delay"; that is, Paul wanted to come to Timothy, but if he delayed, "in order that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself". We get an impression of what the place is, it is God's house and the assembly of the living God, and I have to learn how to conduct myself in this august area, because not any kind of conduct (pardon the expression) can be put up with in that area; it is God's house.

D.E.B. So from one point of view I have my responsibilities in relation to it and God will hold me in relation to how I fulfil them. But from another point of view God can manage without me, can He not? It is His assembly and it existed before I was here, and according to the working out of time it will carry on when I am gone. From that point of view do we not need to hold these things in balance, that whilst we fulfil responsibility, we are dealing with great things that God is able to sustain Himself?

F.C.M. Yes; I am sure you would agree that these are the greatest things we could think of, that God has a house. Paul speaks in Ephesians of the "household of God" (chap 2: 19), where He lives, where He is at home, where things are just as He wants them, and as you so rightly say, He can do without me. If I do not like to conform to the principles and the government of this house, I shall miss my privilege, though the thing itself will go on. But I am sure we would all like to be in it.

E.F.W. Does it cover every individual? It is not how I should serve in God's house but how one should conduct oneself. Would you say that the children are included?

F.C.M. That is a very healthy and practical point. We would all agree that the house of God is not just when we are together, although we enjoy it in a special way then. I ought to be the same at school as I am in the meeting. I am part of God's house all the time. I would not like to misrepresent Him. How inconsistent if I have part in this and yet am known at school as a cheat or somebody who does not tell the truth; that is not conduct befitting to God's house. How am I at home, at business, in the office, in every sphere of life? That is, my conduct in every sphere is to be regulated by the fact that I belong to God's house. Is that right?

E.F.W. Yes; I thought you would encourage each one, however young, that they are to have some appreciation of what is befitting in God's house in their own conduct.

F.C.M. That is very good. I was a bit negative; that puts it positively that there is a place in this house for the young and they are to fit in

happily. They may be arranging the chairs; a boy begins with exercise to give out hymns in the meeting; all this is conduct in God's house. We are all to be suitably controlled and regulated under Christ and the Spirit to contribute to the living experiences of this house.

F.M.K. Reference has been made to Psalm 48: "Walk about Zion"; is that something we can all have part in? We see in different localities what the Lord is working out, the glory of the local assembly, and we learn to value what the Lord has in each place.

F.C.M. Yes exactly, and in this scripture we see the totality of it, the whole complete thing, God's house, the assembly of the living God; that is, it is the place where His immediate movements and His immediate speaking are known.

H.P.W. There is not much said about Lydia, but something is said about her house. There is not much said about the jailor, but what is said pin-points the fact that he was saved and all his house. Does it show the stability of each household as linked with the local assembly and as taking pattern from it?

F.C.M. Yes, very good. That links with the earlier remark that all of us, brothers and sisters, are to take on the character and the spirit suitable to the house of God and the assembly of the living God.

G.A.P. Would the verse in Hebrews 3 bear upon it: "whose house are we, if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end" (v 6)? Would it be that we might identify ourselves as being components of that house and recognise that there is a certain conduct suitable to it?

F.C.M. Quite so, and this should become something greatly treasured by us. Men have their associations, their various strata in society; this is our high privilege. Let us treasure this wonderful dignity conferred upon us to have part in a creature vessel in which God dwells and where He moves and where He is known, and - and this was especially in mind - which is the pillar and base of the truth. Now you say, Where is the truth? Well, it is in Jesus, it is in the Spirit, but it is in the assembly too.

J.M. Is the house of God where God is represented? The truth is what God has been pleased to reveal as to Himself, and the assembly therefore is a vessel that adorns and supports that thought; is that it?

F.C.M. Yes, I think so.

P.v.d.B. The house of God is a thing that is to be arrived at in experience, is it not? I was thinking of Jacob and how he arrived at it, and David also and what he arrived at as to the foundation of it, his experiences too in the Songs of degrees and how the house of God is in view, and how deep experience relates to it. The saints who are walking in the light of the assembly are to be prepared for deep experience, for sorrow too.

F.C.M. Yes, I am sure that is very true, and yet at the outset, although Jacob said "How dreadful is this place!", he must have gained a sense of stability from the fact that that ladder was set up, showing that God had a direct interest in him and wanted him to arrive at the experience, through many exercises, of His house and His dwelling.

E.C.M. In the beginning of Acts the Spirit coming filled all the house. I was thinking of the reference in this first epistle to the Spirit speaking expressly in these latter times (see chap 4: 1). Would you say something about that?

F.C.M. That is certainly very striking. It says it filled all the house; it sat upon each one of them, they were all filled and they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave to them to speak forth (see chap 2: 3-5). Is that not one of the evidences of God's house, the assembly of the living God, that His voice is heard? That would be known in what the Spirit says, It is a place of living, constant communication.

S.D.K.R. I was thinking, in contrast, of what it says in Zechariah 5: "To build it a house in the land of Shinar; and it shall be established, and set there upon its own base" (v 11). Would the house of God be in contrast to what we see in Christendom around us? Does that add to the dignity and privilege of belonging to it?

F.C.M. I am sure it does. This is a divine foundation. You get in 2 Chronicles 3 as to what Solomon built: "this was Solomon's foundation" (v 3). Now this is what God has established. What a privilege to have part in it!

D.E.B. I suppose one of the supreme displays of the stability of the assembly is brought out in Revelation 21, the holy city coming down having the glory of God, with the foundations on display, relating to the truth and how God had worked things out in time.

F.C.M. That is very interesting because you have both sides there. "Having the glory of God" will be the display, but the base will be in evidence the foundation, and you cannot have the one without the other. As to the pillar and base, I suppose the pillar would remind us of those two pillars in front of Solomon's temple; they were for most attractive display, but then there is the base, the thing is honestly, solidly, formatively, established and wrought out, as has been said, through exercise and discipline in persons who are thus set together.

E.C.M. The house of God is never viewed locally, is it? It is universal. Is that important, that what the Spirit would say currently has a bearing on what is universal as to the unity of the saints?

F.C.M. Quite so. So the same principles, the same manners, the same conduct, are to apply universally.

H.C H. In the third epistle of John it says "Demetrius has witness borne to him by all, and by the truth itself"; I thought he was a stable person.

F.C.M. That is a good example.

P.E.M. A feature of power enters into Revelation 3: "He that overcomes, him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God" (v 12).

F.C.M. Very good; that will be the finished workmanship. These thoughts are most attractive. We have had reference to Jacob; God took him up, you might say, in his unformed years, the raw material, and worked with him so patiently and he finishes up as a worshipper. Now that is adornment; that is the supreme beauty and glory of God's work in a man, that he is a worshipper, or a pillar if you view it

that way, adorned and beautified, but also something foundational and basic wrought in the man.

B.W.W. He is able in the presence of two of his grandsons, to speak about his experience of God, and what God had been to him, which would bear upon us who are older as to whether we have had any such experience, and the conveying of that in some way, not only in word, to those who are younger.

F.C.M. Quite so. What words he spoke! On the one hand he said "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life", Gen 47: 9. That was honest; that was his experience with God. On the other hand, as you say, he speaks of "the God that shepherded me all my life long" (Gen 48: 15): that is divine faithfulness which had brought him to the intended divine end.

B.W.W. It was to Pharaoh that he spoke about the fewness and evil of his days, but to his grandsons he speaks about the faithfulness of God, which is a very different thing.

E.M.W. Immediately following this reference to the pillar and base of the truth you get the mystery of piety: "God has been manifested in flesh". What stability in that blessed Man! How did He conduct Himself here? What a wonderful pattern He thus becomes for us!

F.C.M. It is a wonderful thing that those two matters are put together. Paul, after speaking of the assembly, runs right on to what has been manifested in flesh and justified in the Spirit. Could we say that what had its commencement, and was of course unique, in Jesus, in character is continued in the assembly? And it must surely be on the basis of piety.

E.M.W. What was seen so perfectly in Him is continued morally in those that are His own.

F.C.M. Yes, morally. We think of the life of Jesus in its incomparable and unique perfection: has that been extinguished? No, in moral features it is perpetuated by the Spirit in the saints.

J.M. The truth was there in Him; in fact He is the truth; but for us it needs the experimental working out of it, because this pillar is a

formative, adorned idea, is it not? Hence the gravity of any line of things that might undermine the experimental working of the truth among the saints.

F.C.M. I am sure of that. So let us have the attractive side before us, that God has taken us up and is working with us to produce something attractive and adorned and beautified that is the expression of what is so precious to Himself.

A.T. Is it not all secured through suffering? I was thinking of the Lord Himself, what He suffered to secure these things, and the assembly, and persons who are standing rightly. go through suffering, do they not?

F.C.M. Yes. Those two pillars were cast in the clay ground of Jordan, which speaks of that side.

F.M.K. Do we need help to arrive at these things by coming under the influence of Christ exalted as Head, and the teaching and leading of the Holy Spirit in the assembly?

F.C.M. Yes, and under the Lord's authority. I am sure there is no other way in which we can arrive at the experience and the enjoyment of these high privileges.

F.M.K. I thought it linked on with your reference to Acts 13, the Spirit was free there in authority and direction. Shall we not miss the point of stability if the Spirit has not His place in the local assembly?

F.C.M. Yes. This links with what you were saying earlier. We can view the thing objectively, we can have a conception of it, and indeed experience of what is essentially universal, but here in Acts 13 we come right down to the experience and practice and exercises of a local meeting. Antioch was a local assembly marked by stability and unity, and, as you say, the liberty of the Spirit.

F.M.K. The confusion around us is due to the nonrecognition of the Spirit's authority and His speaking, but it should be found with us if we are in the truth, and then we should move in unity.

F.C.M. I am sure that is right; and they were ministering to the Lord.

E.M.W. Should we regard this as a practical impossibility in days of ruin?

F.C.M. I think I know what your answer would be to that! God does not present impossibilities to us, does He?

E.M.W. No; I was thinking of your reference to the fact that it existed; the fact that God did secure this at Antioch is an evidence that He can do that, and I wondered if we should keep that great divine standard before us.

F.C.M. I think that is the whole point. Therefore it would be healthy for each of us to go over this ground. Is the locality in which I am marked by stability? As the Lord looks down can He see features of which He could say, This is like what I had in Antioch at the beginning? There is no reason why it should not be so.

J.W. There are prophets and teachers there in the assembly; would they be contributing to this stability?

F.C.M. Yes, how?

J.W. I was thinking of the need of those two elements - the prophetic word and right, sound teaching.

F.C.M. Yes, they are essential. Hence the importance of the ministry meeting, though, of course, we do not limit what is prophetic to that. Then, as you say, teaching, that the whole scope of the teaching should be maintained in power and accuracy before the saints.

S.D.K.R. In a practical way how do you understand "ministering to the Lord"?

F.C.M. I always feel when such questions are raised that we shall get answers among us which are more than one has in mind, but at least it conveys to me that they were not concerned about themselves; none of these five men were ambitious; they were ministering to the Lord; their great concern was that He should be served and exalted and pre-eminent. Although they were very mixed socially and racially they were all united that in all things He must have the first place.

E.C.M. It is important to see that ministering to the Lord and fasting shuts man out entirely, so that the Lord was really supremely before them.

F.C.M. Yes. If you fast you lose weight. They were setting aside things which would make for inflation and the building up of self; they were fasting to keep spiritually fit. That is a test. Are there things that I go without, not necessarily because they are wrong, but because I have greater things, better things to devote my time and interest to? I think that if Christ is before us and filling our affections, our appetite for certain things will wane; I think that is fasting.

F.M. K. You get a list of happy, satisfied persons, not self-satisfied, but satisfied persons, in Romans 16. Should we not covet to be commended by Paul?

F.C.M. Very good. They were persons who were ministering to the Lord, and, as you say, I think that was a very happy; busy, working community.

A.T. As the Lord is getting something through the ministering, the Spirit can come in and give something further, and then there will be more for the Lord through what the Spirit sends these men out to do.

F.C.M. Exactly. The Spirit has free scope. I just feel the edge of these things. Am I among those who are ministering to the Lord? I can very easily be minister in to my own tastes and to myself in one way or another; these selfless persons were fasting; they were being in that sense a bit hard on themselves, and ministering to the Lord. How acceptable that ministry would be to Him!

H.P.W. Is it not a great encouragement to each of us to think that the Lord has an interest in each one of us personally? These persons are named; the Spirit of God could have left the names out. I wondered if it might help us each to think of ourselves as being an integral part of the local assembly; the Lord's eye is upon us and we are identified. We are not nonentities but persons who have something to do in an unselfish way.

F.C.M. Yes, that is very good. Mr Taylor gave a word on 'Heaven's view of cities' (see Vol.100, p.432). Well, this is heaven's view of Antioch. The Lord would look down with great pleasure on Antioch. He would say, There is Barnabas and there is Simeon and He would be pleased with those men. Another feature is that while they were men of distinction morally and spiritually they were *all working together as one*. Now that is an element of local stability.

J.M. Is that not the secret of this passage? The opening sentence always strikes me: "Now there were in Antioch, in the assembly which was..."; that is, the assembly was there formatively and in function. Is that not something to be set before the saints in these days that we should strive in exercise that the assembly in a formative and functional way should be known? The Spirit of God can, of course, speak of these individuals, but is it in the environment of the assembly being there functionally?

F.C.M. Yes, that is most important. So these men were not independent. In a reading in Antioch you would not find one on one line and another on another, another on a third line; they were in the assembly, they were in the current, the mutual flow, the holy influence of the assembly. They were not individualists in that sense though each would be distinctive.

J.M. Therefore is there not a need to seek to stimulate exercise among the saints that the assembly should actually be experienced? And is it not experienced as each one is there under exercise in relation to the truth?

F.C.M. I think that is very important and very beautiful because, although these were evidently men of gift and ability, you cannot dispense with the assembly, and the working in its measure of each one part. I think the side of what is mutual is essential if the reality and beauty and richness of the assembly are to be realised.

F.M.K. And would unity and working together in the assembly meet the opposition and yet bring in the fruit which appears in the next few verses?

F.C.M. Quite so. Do you not think that where there are healthy conditions in a locality the Lord will spread the influence of it. Now every individual has an influence and every local assembly has an influence. Is the influence of the meeting where I am, or where you are, a healthy one? I think this is quite an exercise because here what was in Antioch was so good, so normal, that the Spirit could say, I am going to spread this; I am going to take some of it and make it effective in a wider area.

F.M.K. If there is not reality and moving together in a local assembly, the influence of such as this Jew, Bar-jesus, may get in.

F.C.M. Quite so.

A.T. It is interesting to see, as to fasting, that they fast again and pray. Is that of all importance when there is work to be done for God? These two men had gone forward but the others are all behind them in support. It is they who let them go; they were holding them before; they loved them and would not want them to go, but love would let them go.

F.C.M. Again it shows normality and stability. They would be very sad to see them go and yet they relinquished them in a spirit of subjection to the word of the Spirit and commended them.

B.W.W. It may link on with Genesis, but influence is not limited to the company, either the whole or the local company; each of us has an influence and not only brothers. These are brothers, prominent persons, but sisters have an influence one way or another.

F.C.M. I do not think we should ever forget that. Two brothers are together having a conversation, or two sisters. What is transpiring? What is being said? Is it something damaging? Is it something the spread and influence of which is opposed to what is proper to the assembly of the living God? I think we need to be very careful because in all our contacts we have an influence; may it be a priestly influence.

Genesis 18 is a position of wonderful stability. Jehovah appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre. This was a fine area

related to Hebron, which evidently is the purpose of God. As Abraham opened his tent door every morning there were these oaks, and that is where we all ought to live. They were stable; they may have been there hundreds of years, but they represent an area of stability which I think we could apply very widely to what is established in Christ, what is in the purpose of God, the stability of the truth itself, and stable persons. Mr Taylor said once that Paul was like one of the oaks of Mamre. Let us live in an area like that, and let those of us who are a bit older provide an element of oak-like stability for younger people.

E.C.M. It is interesting that this stable position follows the carrying out of circumcision. Abraham had gone through the experience.

F.C.M. Quite so. He was marked, as characterized him, by the obedience of faith. It is a fine thing to look at Abraham just alone, and then with his household, as marked by stability.

S.D.K.R. Is that confirmed in verse 19? I thought the expression of that stability would be seen working out.

F.C.M. Very good. This is like the scripture we began with as to righteousness and justice. God had confidence in Abraham: "For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah".

F.M.K. He was not overcome by the heat of the day. We are so very likely to be that.

F.C.M. No, he was not. He might have been having a rest, but he was alert even at midday, and ready for this supreme privilege of the divine visitation.

F.G.M. Is the order in which you have taken these scriptures the way that we would arrive at stability personally?

F.C.M. I think there are two aspects. Practically, as we grow up and go through exercises, we arrive at things on the Jacob line. But on the other hand - and we have been reminded of the need of teaching - does not God bring His end and objective before us so that we can relate our exercises to His end?

F.G.M. I think so, and it would begin with a personal attachment to the Lord.

F.C.M. It must do on our side.

E.P. It says earlier that "Abram moved his tents, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron. And he built there an altar to Jehovah", chap 13: 18. I wondered whether what you have brought before us requires a certain perseverance and committal, because we cannot go along haphazardly, can we? We must be delivered and seek the Spirit's help to carry things out.

F.C.M. Therefore the Lord might use what we have been considering to make some of us move our tents. Suppose I am living in an area of uncertainty; it is much better to move my tent and come and dwell by the oaks of Mamre which are in Hebron.

E.P. It is very sad that Lot pitched tents as far as Sodom. But Abraham had God before him and deliberately moved into this stable position.

F.C.M. That is a very salutary word because chapter 13 gives us those alternatives; it says that Lot saw the plain of the Jordan "as the garden of Jehovah, like the land of Egypt"; and then you have Abraham's view. May there be this exercise with us; if any are consciously in an area of uncertainty and instability let us move our tents and come and dwell by the oaks of Mamre.

E.C.M. In Romans 4 we have "the steps of the faith ... of our father Abraham"; there were certain spiritual steps which were landmarks in Abraham's history.

F.C.M. Yes, and we want to be following in those steps.

E.C.M. We do not arrive at the stable position apart from these steps that have to be faced and worked out in our practical experience.

J.M.W. Is it striking that according to a later chapter both Isaac and Jacob lived in this place? "And Jacob came to Isaac his father to Mamre - to Kirjath Arba, which is Hebron; where Abraham had sojourned, and Isaac", Gen 35: 27. Can we be encouraged to follow

on in the places where our fathers have sojourned and maintain the standards that they maintained?

F.C.M. Yes, that is one way in which it works; Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob. Now in our local meetings young people should see - it is testing to talk about it - but anyway they should see in older persons something that corresponds with the area of Mamre, and I think if I were young I might say, I can see my father is stable; I am a bit mixed up and confused; but I can see he dwells in an area of assurance and stability, and I am going in for that.

A.T. It does not matter how hot it is, or how warm it gets with different things; there is the tent to go into and come out of.

F.C.M. Abraham ran to meet them; so whatever the temperature he was marked by spiritual energy and alacrity.

S.D.K.R. Hebron was one of the cities of refuge. Would that confirm what you say as to our finding a place of stability? it would be a place of refuge.

F.C.M. That is very interesting.

E.M.W. There is also an interesting connection with what was said earlier. Abraham would realise that those oaks were there before he was and they would be there when he was gone.

F.C.M. That is fine. We think of Mr Darby and Mr Raven for example, and other great men of God; where did they live? Whence did they get their conviction and stability? By living at Mamre; and I would like to live in the same place.

D.E.B. Actually Abraham was buried there; his life terminated at this point.

F.C.M. Very good.

A.B.S. Also Isaac and Jacob and maybe most of Jacob's sons were buried in the cave of Machpelah eventually (see Acts 7: 16).

F.C.M. Yes, and what does that mean please?

A.B.S. I suppose, although failure did come in, there was always a stable condition maintained.

MAIDSTONE

30 January 1982

Key to initials

D.E. Burr, Redbridge; P.van den Berg, The Hague; H.C.Hatcher, London; F.M.Knappett, Maidstone; R.Lawrence, Maidstone; E.C.Muggleton, Croydon; F.C.Mutton, Redbridge; F.G.May, Maidstone; J.Mitchell, Bexley; P.E.Meek, Richmond; E.Palmer, London; G.A.Palmer, London; S.D.K.Roberts, Croydon; A.B.Skeffington, London; D.G.Spary, Tunbridge Wells; A.Thomas, Gillingham; H.J.Taylor, London; B.W.Ward, London; E.F.Woodford, Dorking; E.M.Walkinshaw, Gillingham; H.P.Wright, Gillingham; J.Wright, Redbridge; J.M.Wallach, London; P.S.Warren, London; V.E Wraighte, Gillingham.

"OUR NOTHINGNESS"

F.C.Mutton

Psalm 22: 4-8; Genesis 18: 27; 1 Kings 3: 7-9; Ephesians 3: 8; Luke 9: 46-48

I have been struck afresh recently, dear brethren, with that line of Mr Darby's,

'O keep us, Love divine, near Thee,
That we our nothingness may know' (hymn 87)

- a remarkable expression: that we our *nothingness* may know. I trust that our brief consideration of these scriptures may help us as to what was in that beloved servant's mind. I just feel that I need to be deepened in the sense of nothingness. There are two sides, of course, to what is true of the believer. On the one hand we are wonderfully dignified and elevated, taken up from the dunghill and set among princes. As we view it from the divine side we can speak of the greatness of man, men taken up and blessed in Christ, redeemed, given the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit dwelling in us. We are dignified as being the brethren of Christ, His disciples, having part in the assembly and in sonship, given remarkable intelligence and entrance into the purposes of God that go back before the world's foundation. What privileges these are! As a sister has written:

'Absorbed in favour all divine
Conferred on those of high estate' (hymn 116)

That is true of us, dear brethren, and we look at one another and respect one another in that light, as those given by the Father to Christ and taken up for the greatest privileges, now and eternally, that could ever be known and experienced by men.

But there is another side; we are still here in our weak, mortal condition. We read in the house this morning in Psalm 103: "For himself knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth;

For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof knoweth it no more" (vv 14-16); that is true, dear brethren, that is part of our *nothingness*. The footnote to "As for man" is 'Enosh, mortal man'. Then the Psalmist goes on, "But the loving-kindness of Jehovah is from everlasting and to everlasting"; that is the other side of it. I feel that if we are to be rightly in dignity and privilege we need to be maintained and deepened in the sense of our *nothingness*.

Psalm 22 is the utterances, prophetically, by the Spirit, of Jesus. One feels the need of the greatest reverence and care to comment on them at all. The brethren will understand that and the need of not, in a sense, going beyond what others have said as to it. I note that Mr Taylor said, 'It is beyond me to understand that He could say, "I am a worm, and no man"' (see Vol.75, p.150). But He used those words, and I would say we are intended, therefore, to have some sense of what He meant in using them because they bear upon us. If He, holy and sinless, here sacrificially to the uttermost cost for the will of God, could say "I am a worm, and no man", what of our position, we who have the flesh in us? The setting of these words is in contrast to our fathers: "Our fathers confided in thee: they confided, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were deliver ed; they confided in thee, and were not confounded". But as to the Lord, in verse 2: "My God, I cry by day, and thou answerest not", and in that context the Lord says "But I am a worm, and no man". It must mean that He went lower than any man ever could go. For other men, due to the grace and mercy of God, the cry of need was answered; for Jesus it was not answered.

Think of the pathway of Jesus and how it ended in that mockery of justice when He was arraigned. Men normally would be regarded as entitled to justice, to fair treatment, but it was denied Jesus; His judgment was a travesty of judgment. Men normally have a certain respect for one another; for Jesus there was no respect, and how He felt it, as it says in these verses: "All they that see me laugh me to scorn". These are inspired words that we are to weigh. Think of the tenderness of the Spirit of Jesus, how He felt things; think of all that

weighed upon Him, what He felt in His pathway here as to what lay upon man; but then there was what awaited Him:

'Thy path, uncheered by earthly smiles,
Led only to the cross' (hymn 230)

The shadow of the cross was over every day of His pathway, and the pressure intensified. "All they that see me laugh me to scorn". Dear brethren, think of it! Can you hear their laughter, their mockery, their jibes, as that holy Man was there before them, sacrificially, sufferingly? What was their reaction? It was a matter for their jibes and their laughter. He went lower than any man. This was not the normal portion of man, and in that setting the Lord says "I am a worm, and no man". This is to bear upon us. What a rebuke it is to every element in myself of pride, self-exaltation and ambition. These are the depths to which Jesus went. I think that when Paul speaks of the breadth and length and *depth* and height, these things are to be in our minds and upon our spirits, that He went lower than any.

And, dear brethren, one of the things we need morally is to be kept low: 'That we our nothingness may know'.

I turn again to Abraham. As we saw earlier in this chapter, he was a great man of God, dwelling in relation to the purpose and will of God, so great that he could entertain Jehovah, and indeed, entertain what suggestively would bring before us the Godhead, not actually, but suggestively. Now he is interceding with that same God. He had conducted God to judgment in relation to Sodom and Gomorrah, and now he is interceding, he is in line with God, the God who is not willing that any should perish; he is interceding for that city because there is some divine property there. What I want to concentrate on is his expression: "now, I have ventured to speak unto the Lord; I, who am dust and ashes". We shall find in all the scriptures we have read, that moral greatness is accompanied by profound humility; it must be so. I am assured of this, that you cannot have moral greatness apart from deep humility. Let us attend to humility, not only as an exercise within ourselves but by keeping close to the blessed Man who humbled Himself. "I, who am dust and ashes": we have spoken of dust, mortal man; how frail we are,

how physically weak; as to our breath dependent on God from moment to moment. "Dust thou art; and unto dust shalt thou return", Gen 3: 19. This is our mortal condition, and it should keep us very small, very lowly, very dependent, very humble.

But Abraham says, dust and ashes; ashes are the result of sacrifice. You know in connection with the offerings the references to the ashes and the place of the ashes, especially in connection with the red heifer in Numbers 19. Those ashes were kept, the ashes of the red heifer which speak of the death of Jesus, and into the burning had been cast the cedar and the hyssop and the scarlet. That is where Jesus went; He went down into death; and that is where I am to go, in fact where I in the judgment of God have already gone; He has condemned sin in the flesh. But I have to arrive at it, and I think it would be right to say that I have to cast those things into the burning - the cedar, that is my high and proud thought, my self-centred thoughts; and the scarlet, that is the conspicuousness of man, that we like to be in the limelight; and the hyssop, that is the imagined humility that my deceitful heart can claim and take pride in - if we can think of such a thing, and yet such can I be. All that went in the burning; all that was consumed in the death of Christ; but the ashes remained, and those ashes were kept in a clean place, that is, they were reverently treasured and always available as the basis of the water of purification. Let us have to do - I would rather say, we *must of necessity* have constantly to do - with the water of purification, the application to us of the death of Christ.

All that we are in our natural pride, arrogance and self-confidence must go - "I, who am dust and ashes". May we keep near to the ashes, keep near to the death of Christ.

Now in 1 Kings 3 we have an extraordinarily great man, Solomon, like David, a remarkable type of Christ. Here he has ascended the throne and he is to undertake great operations for God, the building of His house and the establishment of His service. Does he step out in assurance and self-confidence to take up all these things? No! "And now, Jehovah my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little child: I

know not to go out and to come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people... Give therefore to thy servant an understanding heart, to judge thy people, to discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this thy numerous people?". He was a king; that was one side; he had glory divinely bestowed; but the other side is that consciously, in his own estimation, he was a little child; "I know not to go out and to come in". Was that inappropriate? It was most appropriate and most suitable, and God honoured it, as He will surely honour this spirit wherever it is found; and without it, I would say again, there is no moral greatness or moral power. It says in verse 10; "And the word pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing"; that is, he had asked for an understanding heart; the footnote says 'a heart that hears'. Let us be on that line. Let us be little children, dependently anxious constantly for the living divine word which will guide us and furnish us. If you and I take the place of a little child in dependence it will please the Lord, and that is really all that matters; and He can add something to us on that basis.

What a wonderful start Solomon had! He ruled over all kingdoms, and then you get the building of his house in all its glory and adornment. Then in chapter 8 all the elders and the heads and princes are assembled and the ark is brought in. Then "when the priests were come out of the holy place... the cloud filled the house of Jehovah... for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of Jehovah" (v 10). How successful he was! How blest was this man who started out, and I am sure continued, in the spirit of a little child! Then in chapter 10 you get the queen of Sheba coming up and there is no spirit left in her when she sees the glory of Solomon.

Now look at chapter 11: "But king Solomon loved many foreign women... And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart". Then it says "And Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians", and then he built "a high place for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites" (vv 3,5,7). What a contrast! What a dreadful collapse of what had been so glorious! Why? He must have

given up the spirit of a little child. He became self-indulgent; he became his own object. Dear brethren, let none of us take refuge in imagined status or past history; collapse could be just around the corner if we are not maintained in the spirit of a little child.

Now we come to Ephesians. This is the zenith of Paul's ministry. It is ministry, and yet as chapter 3 reaches its wonderful climax it is a prayer. We could say, I suppose, that this is Paul at his finest and greatest spiritually. Who had such spiritual intelligence and penetration, such apprehension of the purpose and pleasure of God as this beloved man? What a rich section it is, giving us an inlet into eternity, and yet showing us what is immediate, "in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the allvarious wisdom of God" - that is now. Now we might say to Paul, if we were bold enough, You have been given marvellous gift and enlightenment, what do you think of yourself? "To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given"; that is what he thought of himself, and it was genuine. It was not anything of mock modesty; it was not a sort of robe put on to look good; it was this beloved man's innermost assessment of himself, and I think that is one reason why he could be entrusted with such a ministry. He had been a subject of the ways of the Lord and His discipline for this very purpose, as we find at the end of 2 Corinthians, lest the very greatness of the revelation should cause him to be exalted. That is sobering, that such a man as Paul was in danger of being exalted by the greatness of the revelations committed to him. Does that not remind us of the frailty of our condition and the need to be kept in the sense that we are dust and ashes? I am sure it does, and let us never depart from that area of smallness and nothingness, otherwise we shall become top-heavy as Solomon did. But Paul was preserved in steadiness, and I think it is very powerful and very significant that in this very chapter he says "To me, less than the least of all saints". Mr Taylor said he could hardly understand how Paul could say that, and in a way we cannot; but he did, and it was real, and this was his genuine assessment of himself. His humility sprang from what he felt

inwardly; it was a genuine humility. Beloved brethren, may this be our assessment of ourselves, to take the lowest place, and it is to such, I am assured, that the Lord can give power and support, because they represent the spirit of Jesus.

Now finally we read in Luke 9: "And a reasoning came in amongst them, who should be the greatest". There was obviously partisan feeling. How unprofitable! How unsuitable! - especially when you think of verse 44: "For the Son of man is about to be delivered into men's hands". That was His downward path, He who said of Himself "I am a worm, and no man"; and in *that* context a reasoning came in among them who should be the greatest. O, dear brethren, what an exposure of what is in our hearts! Now it does not seem as if it was a matter, for example, of Peter saying, I am going to be the greatest; or of Andrew saying, I am going to be the greatest; but rather that some would say, We are supporting Peter as the greatest; and another might say, John is to be the greatest. How completely unsuitable! A reasoning came in amongst them; it is like an evil element coming into that circle that should have been pure and holy; this foreign, evil, worldly, indeed Satanic element, because pride originates from him. Am I on that line at all? Are you? Dear brother or sister, have you some favourite you are supporting? That is a foreign element among the people of God.

The Lord then brings in a word: "And Jesus, seeing the reasoning of their heart, having taken a little child set it by him"; the footnote says 'alongside of' Him. That was the first thing; there was a demonstration; there was someone there the Lord could set alongside Himself, identify with Himself and approve of. How humbling this would be to the disciples! If I had been supporting one disciple and you had been supporting another, it is as if the Lord would say, This is what I am supporting, and for the moment it is an element that is lacking among you. Could the Lord take you or take me and set us alongside Him as embodying the spirit which is pleasing to Him? Could He? It is challenging. This is not a matter of ability or gift, it is a matter of spirit and humility, and the Lord sets it by Him. Then there is ministry: "Whosoever shall receive this little

child in my name receives me, and whosoever shall receive me receives him that sent me". I would not attempt to seek to explain it but it evidently means that where that spirit is among the saints it represents Jesus, and it represents the Father; in that sense the divine economy is expressed in that person. I would love to be in that position among the saints, and I am sure you would; and there are divine resources that we may be in the spirit of a little child, having no part *whatsoever* in what glorifies persons unduly, or makes them objects when Christ alone is to be the object. Now this incident is closed by the Lord's own pronouncement: "For he who is the least among you all, he is great"; that is final, dear brethren.

There is no qualification to that; none of us can argue with that, nor would we seek to. It is a definitive, authoritative statement from the Lord Jesus as to moral worth and quality, and brings together these two elements which cannot - be separated, what is small and what is great, and you cannot have what is great unless you have what is small. So the Lord says "He who is the least among you all, *he*" - that is emphatic - "is great". Well, may we be preserved, dear brethren - and we need preservation - in profound humility and dependence so that we may be morally great, for His glory. Amen.

MAIDSTONE

30 January 1982

PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

J.N.Grace

2 Kings 5: 1-4, 13,14; Romans 1: 8-10,16,17; 5: 19

It is a great privilege, in preaching the glad tidings, to be able to convey to you in some way God's thoughts about Christ - not God's thoughts about you, although that might come into it - but the glad tidings concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. You might be able to say that He is your Lord, but if you have never said it before may it be that you will be able to say it before this meeting is over.

The whole world is looking for a man, but God already has His Man, one Man, a wonderful Man, and that Man is Jesus. How wonderful that God has come within our range in a Man! He has been here in conditions of life that we are in in flesh and blood conditions, yet He Himself without sin. Jesus has been here amongst men and women . He grew up here, came in as a babe, grew up into boyhood and manhood. How wonderful it is that God has come so near to us to win our hearts. God being who He is is entitled to you and me, entitled that every creature should be subject. How lawless men are and insubject! You do not know me, or my heart or my life, but I know that if Christ has not secured His place in my heart I am lawless.

The gospel is that you might be brought back into right relations with God in Jesus, the one Man. It was not your fault that sin entered into the world; God does not charge men with things they are not responsible for. You were not responsible for sin entering into the world. God is not holding you responsible for that, but just as by one man sin entered into the world, so by one Man salvation, righteousness and blessing are available to all - by one Man. I would like you to come to know that one Man tonight and to trust Him. I would like you to share the joy that I have in trusting in Jesus; you will never regret that. There are many things you might regret in your life but there is one thing that you will never regret, and that is the time you come to put your trust in Jesus. God says, I have the answer already in one Man to all that has happened in the world

through one man's disobedience. Through one man's disobedience we are all constituted sinners. God says, I am not charging you with that; but you are responsible not to reject the Saviour, and the gospel is presented to you for obedience, the obedience of faith. God does not present the gospel to men in the way that they can accept it or reject it; that is not God's way. If God presents a thing to men for their blessing, then the obligation upon us is to accept it and be obedient. So the glad tidings are presented for the obedience of faith. You do not have to do anything to earn God's favour; His heart is already toward you. Did you know that? You say, If I repent God will change His heart towards me. No, that is not the gospel. The gospel is that God's heart is already towards you; He has forgiveness in His heart for all men, and not all the lawlessness and rebellion of men will change that. You did not bring that about; what brought that about was the death of Jesus, the one Man. How wonderful that through the obedience of Christ, this one blessed Man, God has been able to take this attitude towards all men.

Whether they all come into the gain of it is another matter but the fact is that even if you have been rebellious and disobedient and if your course has been set against God and against Christ, let me tell you this, that God has not changed His attitude towards you. His attitude towards you is one of forgiveness and He wants you to come into the joy of that tonight, and it is all based upon the death, resurrection and glory of Jesus, the One Man. No wonder Paul said he was not ashamed of the glad tidings. I am not either; there is nothing to be ashamed of. It is wonderful that the glory of God is shining in the face of Jesus; it is not the doctrine of it. Paul says "I serve in my spirit in the glad tidings of his Son". I would like to reach the gospel in the spirit of Christ to win you, if I can, for Christ.

That is why I read that passage in Kings about the little captive maid who had been taken out of the land of Israel, taken captive, taken out of her home into a foreign country to serve in a strange household and there she was serving Naaman's wife. Was she vindictive? Was she rebellious? Was she bitter because of what had happened? No, she knew God and she knew God's heart was

towards men even though it be in Old Testament times; she served, like Paul in her spirit in the glad tidings. I think this is the best way to serve in the glad tidings really - in your spirit; it is a sort of exclamatory way that comes from the heart. She did not set forth the doctrine or the teaching that lay behind it (the whole teaching of Scripture is important in the understanding of the truth), but really what God is after is your heart. This little maid was serving in her spirit in the glad tidings of God's Son, so that is how we can serve; and the youngest of us, if we put our trust in Jesus, can serve in our spirits in the glad tidings of His Son. We do not have to be grown up, or acquire a great knowledge of Scripture, or to read the ministry (read it by all means, and read the Scriptures every day), but if you have to do with others it is what is in your spirit that counts, and that is what this little maid did. She was misunderstood, even in the preaching that she made she was misunderstood, but it was effective and it caused that her master found his way to the prophet that was in Samaria and received blessing. Well, may you receive blessing tonight, and that blessing comes from this one Man, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So Paul says he is not ashamed of the glad tidings, the power of God to salvation. You might say, I have thought over things a good deal and have been brought up in a Christian household, but I feel too weak, I do not understand much about it and I have to face lawless companions, I have to face the influences of the world at work. The gospel is not about you: Scripture is not about you. The gospel is about God; it is about your salvation and about your sins but about the power of God in salvation. This letter to the Romans is all about God; some people think it is about us, but it is about God and God's Son and God's truth and God's salvation, and that is what I am speaking about tonight. It is a wonderful thing to prove the power of God in salvation and you will never do that unless you put your trust in Jesus. It is so simple; it is the very simplicity of the gospel that stumbles people. They think that they have to acquire a certain knowledge, and beyond that they have to do something to merit the favour of God, but you do not have to do a thing because it

was all done long before you or I came upon this scene, and the basis was laid in the work of Jesus, a work of perfection. When He died on the cross, He bore all the judgment of God that was due to us because of our sins and the basis that was laid in His death enables God to come out in full and free forgiveness.

Would you not like to be constituted righteous instead of constituted a sinner? What do I have to do to acquire that kind of righteousness? You have to come to an end of yourself and come to it that you have to take this plunge. That is what Naaman came to.

We are so slow to take the plunge and leave ourselves - to leave our fancied power or righteousness or whatever you like, our histories, standing, place; to change our man and put our trust in Jesus. That is what this type means, and Naaman was slow to come to it; he says, I know a better way: "Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" But finally he had to come to own, and we all have to come to own, that, try as we may, God's way is always better. So forsake yourself, take the plunge and put your trust in Jesus.

Two things are involved in the gospel: one is the blood and the other is the water. May I raise a few questions with you? First of all, have you faith in the blood? The blood is what gives God a basis to come out in righteousness, to declare His righteousness, that He might be just; not that you might be just but "that he should be just, and justify him that is of the faith of Jesus", Rom 3: 26. This is a solid basis for you to rest your soul on, and you have to do nothing but come to this great, wondrous fact that God, instead of requiring righteousness of you, is bringing out His own righteousness established in the death of Jesus. O, put your trust in the blood! There is nothing else that you can put your trust in in relation to your sins but the blood of Jesus. It is so wonderful, so great in its efficacy before God, and God can pass over the sins of all who have gone before who put their trust in Him. Men like David, men like Adam, men like Abel: how could God pass over the sins of all those men? Because of the blood of Jesus, because of the mercy-seat. The blood was on the mercy-seat, and when you come to Christianity you

have the antitype, - the antitype which is always far more than the type - and therefore it is *whom* God has set forth a mercy-seat; you come to the person of Jesus. Put your trust in the blood of Jesus tonight and it will secure you a place of blessing in the presence of God eternally and nothing else will do so. You cannot add to that and you cannot take away from it either; the work of redemption stands in its own glory. Before ever you came on the scene, before you committed a sin, the blood of Jesus was the basis on which you could have to do with God and stand eternally before Him. The righteousness of God is revealed in the glad tidings in the principle of faith; that is to say, not one work on your part is acceptable to God, only the work of Christ, and it is on the principle of faith to faith.

That brings you to the question whether you are prepared to believe God. You can hear the gospel once; very likely you have heard it week after week but has there been a living link in your soul with Jesus? This is a very personal matter; you can sit down in a congregation and listen to the gospel and assent to the truth of it, be convicted as to the truth of it, yet never come into the blessing of it because you will not have to do with Jesus, the one and only Man, the one on whom blessing depends. May you have to do with Him tonight! It is on the principle of faith, outside of anything you can do; the work has been done, and you accept that in the faith of your soul: "according as it is written, But the just shall live by faith". God puts you among the just. A wonderful thing that you have an acceptance in the presence of God! And if God takes you on, no one can raise an objection; if God is for you who can be against you?

It is God you have to do with about your own sins: your relationship with God is a prime matter for you tonight. It is a matter of your blessing for time and eternity, and your relationship with God depends on whether your faith rests in the blood of Jesus. Thank God this is a day of grace and a day when God is accepting men. In His patience God has gone on with the lawlessness and rebellion of men. Think of the world today; it is increasing in its rebellion every day and God is not bringing judgment upon it. Why? Because He wants men to be saved; His heart is unchanged in His attitude

towards men: "who desires that all men should be saved" (1 Tim 2: 4). You can think of men that have been rebelling against God right up to this present time - and it may be you - or of men in darkness; you can think of men, women and children, whatever their age or status in life, whatever their history, God will have all men to be saved. He is no respecter of persons. The God that I know would have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. The choicest Christian blessing that you or I could enjoy, God has in His heart for every man; that is the Saviour God, that is the God I preach in the person of Jesus. You need to confess your sins and be brought to repentance. Perhaps your proud heart will not allow you to go that way; then I would say it is your proud heart that is keeping you from blessing. But God enjoins all men that they should repent - "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ", Acts 20: 21. How wonderful if you come within the circle of those who can say, Our Lord Jesus Christ! He is Lord, Lord of all, and the time will come when every knee will bow, heavenly and earthly and infernal beings too, all will bow to the name of Jesus. Why not bow tonight? God's attitude is one of forgiveness and He wants you to come right now into all the blessings that are in His heart. He wants you; it is not your wealth He is after, not your intelligence simply that He is after - He wants that too - but He wants your heart. He says "My son, give me thy heart" (Prov 23: 26), and in order to win your heart God has given His best in the person of Jesus, because Jesus is the Man after God's own heart. All that God wanted and looked to find in a man He found in Jesus, in the person of His own Son; never a son answered to a father's heart like Jesus, and the price of your blessing is the blood of Jesus; God was prepared to give His own Son.

Paul says in Romans 5, "For as indeed by the disobedience of the one man the many have been constituted sinners, so also by the obedience of the one the many will be constituted righteous". Then in the next chapter Paul goes on to speak about sin. The matter of sins is one thing but the matter of sin is another, and there is an area in which sin is working, and that is in this world where Satan has a

place. Earlier in chapter 5 Paul says "by one man sin entered into the world" (v 12). There is a way out, and that way out is through the death of Jesus. I think we would all like to be clean. You know what it is to get defiled and dirty; what a wonderful thing it is to get fresh and clean! Well, in the acceptance of the gospel it is just that; you can be clean, you can be washed in the blood of Jesus. John says, "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood", Rev 1: 5. Are your sins all gone? Do you feel free from any charge against you because of your sins? Then there is more than that; it is a question of your state, because sin has entered into it, the very poison of the serpent has entered into it, but God has dealt with that in the death of Jesus. That is really what was involved with Naaman. Come to an end of yourself; come to the fact that sin has been working right in you. Change your man; instead of thinking of yourself and what you can do or what you cannot do, it is a wonderful thing to find the deliverer in Jesus. Every truth that God has brought within our range finds its expression and centre in a living, blessed Person. It is not only a system of doctrine, although the doctrine is necessary; the doctrine is because of the One who is the centre of it, and there is enlargement opened up to our hearts intelligently by the Spirit that the kernel of everything is the Person and work of Jesus.

And so we come back to Naaman, and the message to Naaman was to go down to take the plunge. Come to the fact that your whole history has been ended in the death of Jesus, not only that sin was met but all that you are has been finished with and gone out of sight in the death of Jesus. That is what Naaman had to come to. We love to cling to some distinction of ourselves; we do not like to take the plunge. We may feel the conviction of things and the need, maybe, of confessing the name of the Lord, but we do not like to take the plunge; but when you do take the plunge, what a wonderful change! There is a hymn which says, 'What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, since Jesus came into my heart'. O dear friends, Christianity is experience; I wish to get that into your soul, because you may know everything about it, yet not

have the blessedness of the experience of the plunge and having to do with Jesus. O take the plunge tonight! Maybe you have been brought to the point of committal, maybe someone here tonight has come under the sway of the love of Jesus, knows Him as their Saviour and has put their trust in Him; they thank God that the question of their sins has been settled once and for all. I know that God will not bring up my sins against me again because my Saviour died and He is up there, and not a charge can be brought against Him, it has all gone in His death, and He lives there for my justification. But what as to being left down here? God has not taken us yet; He has left us down here and He wants you to commit yourself to the testimony down here. That means the confession of Jesus as Lord; that means that I am going to commit myself to His interests down here beginning with the Lord's supper, the identification with those that walk in the fellowship of God's Son. You say, Well I have not come to that yet, I am not old enough. Why are you not old enough? I do not see anything at all in these scriptures about the question of age. It is a question of putting your faith and trust in Jesus and committing yourself to Him. To those who have drawn back, whatever it is that has hindered you, I say that the word of the Lord to you tonight is, Take the plunge. Be like Naaman and go down. He was told to wash but it says that he plunged himself seven times. How thorough he was! The word uttered by the little maid had reached his ears, then the word of the prophet, and then God is so patient that he had someone near him, one of his servant drew near to him and said to him, My father, is it not better just to do this? "If the prophet had bidden thee to do some great thing"; is not that just like us all? How ready we would be to do it, but how much rather when he says wash and be clean. It is the very simplicity of things that stumbles us. O, I would say to you, Take the plunge, commit yourself without reserve to Jesus, Jesus up there and His interests down here and be bound up with those who are prepared to walk in the reproach of Christ in the identification of all that stands related to the pleasure of God, worked out now in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. For His Name's sake.

STREATHAM LONDON

15 November 1981

CHILDREN AS LIGHT-BEARERS

The first command of creation was "Let there be light". The majesty of this is readily felt by the simplest of us who have eyes to see with, yet there must even now be many mysteries of light too deep for the men of science. This is of course natural light but when the Lord Jesus came into the world the light that was in Him was moral light shining for the consciences and hearts of all, but lighting up the souls and spirits of all who received it - received Himself. That light could not be "apprehended" or taken captive by the moral darkness of persons who obscured it, so we are assured of its constant shining.

Our great source of light is the sun, a type of the Lord Jesus in heaven, the light and life of believers. We cannot look upon the sun in its might, neither can we comprehend the full glory of the Lord.

Yet as the white light of the sun is seen in the beautiful colours of the rainbow so we can behold the various glories of Christ, each one distinct yet all merging perfectly together. We are taught that there are in the bow the seven well-known colours, but that there are also two more which cannot be seen with the unaided eye although we get the benefit of their rays. There is therefore always that which is beyond us.

Time has from very early days been measured by the movement of the shadow of the light of the sun on sundials of various kinds. A story of God's great mercy is woven around that of king Ahaz. His son king Hezekiah being very ill prayed for his life to be spared and prolonged. As a sign of God's readiness according to His own will to grant this request the shadow would either go forward or go backward ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz. The suffering king was quick to realise that it is an easy thing to lose time but that if the shadow should go back it would be like gaining time! Have we learned the lesson from this incident recorded more than once in the Bible? Ten degrees is forty minutes - the time of a gospel preaching! God in long-suffering mercy is holding back the shadow from reaching the judgment-point on His dial of time whilst our Sun shines in His heavenly glory.

At the opposite end of creation's scale to the sun is the tiny beetle-like creature we know as the glowworm. It is the female that shows a distinct bluish green light. I owe it to the shining of large numbers of these creatures that I was saved from cycling straight into a bank of earth one dark war-time night. Morally the saints at Philippi were glow-worms, appearing as lights in this dark world, radiating the glad tidings and saving persons from running into destruction. Are you put to shame by this little creature?

J.C.Evershed