

A
WORD
IN ITS
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THE PREACHING

HEAVENLY ADMINISTRATION

THE CHILDREN'S WORDS

THE PREACHING

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Ecclesiastes 1: 1-5, 12, 13; 12: 9-14

It is in mind to say something as to the preaching and the urgent need of it in our day. The apostle Paul said "woe to me if I should not announce the glad tidings", 1 Cor 9: 16. It is one of Paul's particular ministries, the ministry of the glad tidings, and he says to Timothy, as he is about to pass off this scene, setting out his last thoughts: "proclaim the word; be urgent in season and out of season", 2 Tim 4: 2. "In season" is the regular preaching time, as on the Lord's day evenings; "out of season" is every other time. He says also "do the work of an evangelist". We all come under this injunction from our father Paul, being such a one, as he says to Philemon, "as Paul the aged", full of experience, full of days, full of desires in connection with the generation to come. He makes short shrift of excuses. He would say, as he did to Timothy, "do the work of an evangelist". If you said to him, The soil is hard, the persons who attend are very small in number, he would say, There is a great revival, not in those who listen to the preaching, but in the preachers. The revival is to be in us; we are to preach. Many of us have said we could not preach, but the Lord will not have it; He will send us out. "Supplicate therefore the Lord of the harvest that he may send out workmen into his harvest", Luke 10: 2. There will be words for it, as it says in our last scripture: "The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words", for the Lord will give them. Whatever we do, the preaching is to be done and it is to be done by us all, and if there are persons who are shy of it, we are to get over our shyness. If there are persons who feel their weakness, there is a greater power available, the power of the Lord Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Lord Jesus to form us for the time, as He said to Peter and others: "and I will make you become fishers of men", Mark 1: 17. His making ability has not ceased. He said, as He went

up to heaven, that the disciples were to stay there in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high, "the Holy Spirit having come upon you, and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem" - that is the place where they were - "and in all Judea" - that is the province around - "and to the end of the earth" - that is wherever you may be.

Paul had two main ministries, one the ministry of the glad tidings and the other the ministry of the assembly. We may feel in these days that we know more about the ministry of the assembly than we do about the ministry of the glad tidings, the gospel; but, in a certain sense, it is just two ways of saying the same thing, because foundationally the assembly is enfolded within the "mystery of the glad tidings"; in fact it is called that. The sixth chapter of Ephesians speaks of the "mystery of the glad tidings" (v 19), which may be said to be a reference to the truth of the assembly. The glad tidings is like a land which is being prospected and entered into, and trails blazed in it, and wherever you go it yields unsearchable riches. Paul speaks of "the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ", Eph 3: 8. And as you think of this you probe into it a little and you find the mystery, that is, it is like a wonderful secret which we may all come at as we listen to the glad tidings; here is something spoken of which we perhaps have never thought of, namely, the assembly, the great matter of what God has here linked up with Christ for ever.

Now I desire to speak of these three men, Noah and Jonah and Solomon, because each of them is said to be a preacher. Noah is said to be a preacher of righteousness, Jonah preached to the Ninevites and caused them to repent, and Solomon calls himself the Preacher. We do well to gain a little education from these people, because in one of them, namely in Noah, we learn something of the magnificence of divine speaking and the magnificence of divine action. The Lord Jesus, though not yet incarnate, not yet having come on earth as a Man, is described as going in Spirit and preaching "in the days of Noah", preaching through the mouth of Noah. Divine Persons can do anything; speaking of Christ the word says "put to death in flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, in which also

going he preached to the spirits which are in prison"; and to make quite certain that we time and place it correctly, it speaks about the time that Noah was preparing the ark. I want to encourage every one of us here in relation to the preaching, because it is a wonderful thing that the person with a kind of hopeless outlook should get hold of this thought that a divine Person will choose the mouth of a man in order to bring about wonderful results. It says that the "Holy Spirit spoke before, by the mouth of David" (Acts 1: 6), and that Christ, in Spirit, preached by Noah. The situation may be hard and hopeless, but Noah preached for over a century, probably for one hundred and twenty years, and as far as we know he had not a single convert except possibly his own family, so that when the judgment came there were saved Noah and his wife and his three sons and their wives. God said to him "Thee only have I found righteous upon the earth", and the Spirit says he was righteous in his generation. We are not facing a hopeless situation like that. We are not surrounded merely, as converted persons, by our family; we have brethren up and down the land and over the world and they are all praying for us, we are praying for them, so we may well proceed with this wonderful work of the preaching. Who was the Preacher here? Christ. How did it come about? He in Spirit used Noah as a mouthpiece - a retrospective action. There is something extremely wonderful about it that a divine Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, went Himself and in that time actually spoke through the mouth of Noah. What did He speak about? He spoke of righteousness, what is right; it means that if you take advantage of what God has laid open, in that case the ark and in our case Christ, you will be saved. But the other side is, that if what is provided by God is disregarded, refused, there is nothing else but judgment, in this case the flood. Many people must have thought, as they spent their last breath, If only I had listened to Noah. Possibly the ark was there, floating within their gaze amidst the descending judgment of God in those waters. Many must have thought, If only I had listened to the preacher. He was a preacher of righteousness, and that means to set out what is of God and to set out the only alternative. Is that beyond you? It is not beyond us; we read the Scriptures and we can say in a small way what God has

provided and what is for the benefit of the believer and what is the only alternative. The power of the Spirit is there, and the Lord is personally interested in it. I dare say in his own way, that Abel preached, and we can say that many after him preached who are not called preachers; some of them are called prophets, that is, they spoke on behalf of God, but Noah is called a preacher, or a herald, of the righteousness of God. That would be a good thing to get into our minds.

The next one is Jonah. In the chapter read, Matthew 12, he is mentioned as a preacher who brought about repentance. The Pharisees and scribes asked for a sign and Jesus answering said to them "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it save the sign of Jonas the prophet" - Jonah the preacher. I suppose the two go together. Jonah the prophet sets forth the particular mind of God bearing upon the sufferings and death and burial, particularly the burial, of our Lord Jesus Christ. I would say a word about that, because Jonah is not the only one who preached the burial of Christ. Paul preached it.

Talking about the gospel to the Corinthians he says "that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures; and that he appeared", 1 Cor 15: 3,4. Paul dealt with the burial of Christ because he had a great impression that God has finished with the first order of man. A man is not finished at his death; a man is finished at his burial. In some countries there are persons who die and are preserved in a certain way that they lie in state, we are told, for a period; finally they are buried. At the burial all is finished, but in a certain way not until then. People seem to linger over the past glories and greatness in the eyes of men of the one who is gone, but at the end he is buried.

Now Paul says "and that he was buried". It means that, in the burial of Christ, God sees the final putting away, for ever, of the first *order* of man. You may say to yourself, I am clever, I have read philosophy, I know all about the comparison of religions in the world, I know a great deal more than is said in this room. That may be, but

God has finished with the order of man who knows it; that is it: "and that he was buried". The first order of man is *gone*. And somebody else will say, Well, you know, I have never done any harm to anybody and my neighbours will attest that I am about the humblest man in this town, I would go down before anybody. But God does not want your humility either. He does not want the cleverness at the top of the scale or the humbleness at the bottom. He is finished with the man, and the wonder of it is that Christ has taken our place in this regard, both in regard of atonement for God and remission of sins for us and burial too. He has taken it all, in what we call a vicarious way, for the sake of others. You do not have to be buried for God to see the end of the first order of man in you, for Christ has done that. Paul delights in it, and for him it was a part of the truth of the gospel - "and that he was buried". Any real and truly exercised parent in a Christian household will not hesitate to put that mark upon his family, his household; and he gets his children baptised so as to make it apparent that he is not expecting anything from this world, nor expecting his children to develop in the features of this world. He writes death upon it, as God has done. God keeps His people here for a while; in the normal way they live and die and are buried. When He raises them, when the Lord Jesus comes with His assembling shout and all the dead in Christ rise, how will they rise? Shall we rise as we are now, in these bodies? Not at all the first order of man is finished. God has finished with it. When we come out of the grave He is going to put a dress on us as it pleases Him. He has arranged the dress in which each one of His own shall come up all the saints, a dress of glory.

As we read the Lord's words about the Son of man being three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, the sign being set by what happened to Jonas we are to think of these things. The Lord did not explain them then except to point to them as signs; we can understand the sign now because we understand the scripture and we understand why Paul put in the word about burial. Our justification and everything else we need, our glorious end, is "in Christ". The Lord just leaves that sign with those who enquire. It is

a gloriously liberating portion because it leaves us expecting nothing from the first order of man. However talented, however forceful, if it is just the man of the first order, then God is finished with it; but what He goes on with is the order of man that is "in Christ", because the burial is not the end, there is the raising from the dead: "and that he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures; and that he appeared". The gospel contains these things, the preaching contains them, and my suggestion is to us all that we first of all bear them in mind and, as we have opportunity, we preach them. Thus the Lord Jesus says "Ninevites shall stand up in the judgment with this generation" (by "this generation" He means such as the scribes and Pharisees) "and shall condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold more than Jonas is here". It was God Himself there in Christ. This is another point for the preacher, and you may think it right, if you like, for me to point the sermon at myself. The preacher is to *go through the experience of death* in power in his soul. Jonah was a gifted man and God called him out to "go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me". He did not, he deliberately turned his back, and as we know, he went "down to Joppa", down into a ship, down into the side of the ship, and there he slept, after God had given him a command. There is something wrong there. But God had not finished with him, and He has not finished with us in regard of this matter of the preaching. He followed Jonah, even on the ship, caused all kinds of disaster, and the men helped him as much as they humanly could; they threw cargo overboard and so on, but it was not until they threw Jonah overboard that the catastrophe ceased. And this experience of death was accomplished when he in the belly of the fish, cries to God. He talks about the depths, not now from the point of view of the men throwing him into the water; he says "For thou didst cast me into the depth, into the heart of the seas, and the flood was round about me; all thy breakers and thy billows are gone over me. And I said, I am cast out from before thine eyes, Yet will I look again toward thy holy temple. The waters encompassed me, to the soul; the deep was round about me The weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of

the mountains; The bars of the earth closed upon me for ever". That is an experience, the bitterness of the experience of the lesson of death, not of course literal death in ourselves, or we should not be here, but the moral lesson. You have stood, I expect, by the bed or the grave of a loved one in the family, and some of us have stood by the beds and graves of those very dear to us. It is not only the historical fact that the person was here and is now gone, but it is how you get to God about it. It is what God has to teach us, for He takes us down He teaches us the lesson of the cutting off which is in death, the cutting off of all prospects, all gift, all fellowship, all opportunities, a very sobering lesson. Thinking about a godly man who died in our family, I fell down before the Lord and said, "and let my end be like his", Num 23: 10. When God strikes in death He always has something to say to us and we have to learn it. Paul learnt it, I should say, more deeply than anybody there when he was stoned at Lystra and left for dead. I have no doubt, as far as the outward view went, he was dead, nothing in him at all, no life. But as the disciples surrounded him he got up and walked into the city again; the very city that had stoned him he entered again and preached. Marvellous! But in that time he had learnt what it was to get right down in the teaching of death. I dare say it was at that time that he was caught up to the third heaven; that is to say, losing all sense of what would hold one here, he says "whether in the body I know not, or out of the body I know not, God knows", 2 Cor 12: 2.

He was learning something. So these lessons are to be learned and I think we are to learn in them too the absolute unprofitableness of the flesh, including our strongmindedness, our ability to manage things, to give a command, see it carried out, in the family, in the business, perhaps even in the meeting. Death cuts at the root of all that and it makes us calculate in regard of another sphere.

You would think that Jonah, after such an experience, would be in power, and would not make any more mistakes, but when God sent him again, "the second time", the preaching that God gave him was "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" That is not much of a preaching, you may say. Indeed it is, because it gets

people to think as facing the end, and that is a great thing; *they all repented*. Jonah was very irritated about it. How hardly this matter takes us, how hardly it dies with us, this matter of adjustment, even the touch of death! But the Lord tells us here "they repented at the preaching of Jonas", from the king on his throne right down to all the families, the whole city, even the cattle, and everything was covered with sackcloth, to take a proper place before God. Thus God uses the mouths of men to preach and even gives the preaching: "preach... the preaching that I shall bid thee". Paul says "God, who set me apart even from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me that I may announce him as glad tidings". God does all these wonderful things, and it is for us to accept the lesson that the preaching entails. So we are not to be discouraged; this is all for our good and profit. We all have to go this way; the young men God treats very gently, but He will teach them more later on. When Samson was going on his mission it was a young lion that roared against him, not a full-bodied, bullpowered lion, a young lion, something he can manage; God sees to that. The evil that you meet will not be more than you can manage, and Samson rose up and slew it, and there was fruit out of it. God would assure us that there is sufficiency in the power of the Spirit. "The Spirit of Jehovah came upon him". The whole of Nineveh came down. There is not much said in that preaching, but God was there. God was with the preacher, God was with the message. It was "Jehovah's messenger, in Jehovah's message", Hag 1: 13.

Now I speak of Solomon for a moment, for the Lord mentions him here. The queen of Sheba "came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, more than Solomon is here"; that is, of course His own Person. Solomon calls himself the Preacher, and the word used for preacher is 'a former of assemblies'. I judge that this is to be always in our minds in preaching or in having to do with the preaching, something more for the assembly. And Solomon carries glory with him wherever his preaching goes. He said of himself "I was a son unto my father, tender and an only one in the sight of my mother", Prov 4: 3. There is something unique

about the sonship of Solomon; it is covered with glory. I believe that Isaac, as reflective of the Lord's sonship, is caring for the assembly here, mostly, and Joseph is reflective of the glory of God secured among the nations; but Solomon is speaking always towards God, always thinking towards God. If I may put it this way, when Solomon was preaching he would always be thinking, not so much of the relief of the person, but of what a portion God would get from it. "I was a son unto my father". He is always thinking of that, and I do not think it will be a great exaggeration to say that a "tender and an only one in the sight of my mother" dimly brings in the assembly. He is always thinking of God. So he says "Jehovah said that he would dwell in the thick darkness, but I have indeed built a house of habitation for thee", 1 Kings 8: 13. Now that kind of preaching is the most pleasing preaching there is, because it is one specially of interest with God, sympathetically supported by God, because it is calculated to bring in something for God. The man himself had tried everything, as Ecclesiastes shows us fully. He said "I applied my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under the heavens; this grievous occupation hath God given to the children of men to weary themselves therewith". He was not without knowledge, he knew all these things, he knew the great works of men, he knew their wisdom, and he says "I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness and folly". Some people when they are in despair are just impossible, you cannot do anything with them.

Solomon went into it to learn about it, and he writes about it, and he writes about the tears of the oppressed and many other things.

Solomon is not preaching a theoretical sermon. He says, I know all that you are going through; have you lost somebody? I know all about that. Are you having a good time in the world? I have tasted that, but I want you for God, and I want you for the assembly. So at the end he tells us to consider these things; it is that kind of preaching in the mouth of the one who typified the Lord in His glorious sonship. He says "The words of the wise are as goads, and the collections of them as nails fastened in". The words of the wise, they get under the skin, like goads; "the collections of them as nails fastened in". Something sticks to you and it forms a holding place in

a moral way for God to hang something on. And then he says " And besides, my son, be warned by them: of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh". But it will be a good thing to read the words of the wise and the words which can be as "collections" fastened in. The books of this world are a passing thing. Let us hear the end of the whole matter: "Fear God". That is, he brings us to have to do with God and he presents us with what Paul presents, that is, the preaching of sonship in all its glory. Whether you are preaching at the desk or preaching privately, have these things in your mind, the glory of what is presented in sonship in the preaching, for sonship comes by faith in Christ Jesus, so you may include it in the preaching as you go over it in your mind. I think Solomon was very free himself, free in all the realm of glory that he moved in.

These thoughts are very fragmentary, maybe, but they are meant to encourage us all that we may proclaim the word, do the work of an evangelist and see that we do not fail or flag in our time. May the Lord give us help for it, for His Name's sake!

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HEAVENLY ADMINISTRATION

Matthew 5: 1,2; 2 Chronicles 9: 1-8; Ephesians 3: 8-12

A.J.E.W. I feel that the Spirit would have to say to us about the heavenly administration which should be apprehended by us, and in which the assembly has a unique place, involving, as his must, the glory of Christ as the great administrator, One who administers not, as alas men do, on the basis of immediate expediency, but who embraces the whole scope of activity as beloved of the Father. The Father loves the Son and has given all things to be in His hand, as John tells us (see John 3: 35). The "all things... in his hand" is a reference, not developed in that scripture, to what is under Christ and can be affected and used by Him, and is secured in the widest way for the Father's pleasure. I gain the impression that we need an enlarged view of the glory of this administration so that, morally equipped to have embraced a part in it, we might not be lacking in having our own place.

Matthew emphasises to us in chapter 5 that the Lord went up into the mountain, and the note reminds us helpfully that the intention, in the original, is to mark a contrast between the mountain and the plain from which He came. It is to emphasise for us the position of elevation from which He speaks. We know that the rich instruction which we have had speaks of this as the mount of legislation. That enters into our administration under Christ, because it seems that He proceeds, we could say, quickly, relatively early in His service to set out a great range of principles. Hence the expression, the mount of legislation, involving the authority that the Lord Jesus has to set forth principles, and to take whatever measures the administration requires to ensure that there is no departure from those principles. The principles are very attractive, beginning with blessing and the basis for it, going on to impress upon us, in contrast to what there had been in Judaism, what the Lord Jesus has to say: "I say unto you". I thought we might therefore, all of us having some appreciation of the structure, so to speak, of these chapters running on to the end of chapter 7, get some fresh impression of the basis in legislation and principle under

the authority of Christ, upon which the course of His administration here, anyway, must depend.

G.A.P. Is it a characteristic feature that His disciples come to Him? He says of others "ye will not come to me that ye might have life", John 5: 40.

A.J.E.W. That is in contrast, it seems, to the crowds that He saw.

Crowds in general in Scripture are never to be relied upon; the present time would bring that out in our experiences. "His disciples came to him" involves that they had some impression of the elevated point from which He would set forth the elevation. It is a wonderful thing to get an immediate impression of Christ in that sense, to find not only the position that He occupies but the manifest authority with which He speaks, which is right at the heart of our subject.

G.A.P. That opens the way for the teaching and for us to be found in it.

A.J.E.W. Just so, because it is not just the letter of the teaching, it is the word of the Teacher; and what a glorious teacher! Matthew brings out the side of Emmanuel, God with us, leaving us some impression very early of the glory of His Person. It is good to think not just of the letter of the teaching, which of course is needful, but to see it as the expression of the mind of One so glorious as Jesus, taking up at once a distinct and definite position of an administrative kind to secure what is for God's pleasure. This kingdom side is necessary as a basis of all that follows in reference to the assembly, and the administration from heaven into which we are brought.

F.M.K. The disciples came to Him as seeing the dignified way in which He went up to the mountain and having sat down. Did they get an impression of Him and the way He was setting this administration on?

A.J.E.W. I am glad you express that because a sense of the dignity of things in relation to Christ and to the assembly is something we need to maintain. We know that in the scene around us there is little by way of respect active among men, but the dignity of the glorious legislator here is to lift our minds to the proper level from which His

administration springs, and also to give us a touch of the dignity that would mark us as we assemble, as the assembly in that sense becomes practical in expression among us in the places where we are, or indeed in a meeting like this.

F.M.K. It is seen also in Solomon and in men of God who have been used to bring the word to us.

A.J.E.W. Yes, and of course the queen of Sheba takes account of it in Solomon's servants and those who wait upon him. It is a very significant thing that they had a bearing, personally it seems, that attracted the attention of one who came to see something of Solomon's wonderful administrative order.

F.C.M. You get the words 'deportment' and 'order', and then the thought of his ascent; all these are here really expressed in perfection in the movements of Jesus. So even His physical movements are called attention to, that "he went up into the mountain and having sat down... and, having opened his mouth" - the perfect expression in the Administrator of what His disciples are to be conformed to.

A.J.E.W. Showing among other things that the Lord Jesus as the glorious administrator has an immediate appreciation and valuation of the administration as a whole and those in it. He has great regard for his beloved disciples as coming to Him. All that you say about deportment and suchlike is enlarged to us in the Pauline epistles, is it not? It is very noticeable how after covering the spiritual level of things at such elevation in the first three chapters of Ephesians, including the part we read, we come down to practical injunctions, involving what you speak of as our deportment. This must reflect the character and dignity of the kingdom and the administration to which we belong.

R.L. The Lord valued the committal of His own, did He not? He says in Luke "But ye are they who have persevered with me in my temptations", chap 22: 28. We might have thought of a good deal of failure with them, but the Lord valued their committal, and that would

be more than just their presence with Him; they persevered with Him.

A.J.E.W. That is a fine beginning. That committal to Him, and the setting of what we have read and of this whole section, really calls attention to that, that there is on the part of the disciples at least, distinct as they are from the crowd, an element of committal such that the Lord is free to unfold exhaustively the great principles relating to the kingdom. I call attention to the exhaustive character of what is here because, speaking reverently, the words of the Lord Jesus were never wasted; He did not address Himself to persons who were not, some of them at least, competent to carry forward and to hold dear what He addressed to them. The words of Jesus are so precious that we need to see that they were never uttered without the expectation that there would be some distinctive answer in those who heard Him. That brings a very distinctive appeal as to an occasion like this. Is the Lord speaking to us? If He speaks to us He relies upon us that there shall be some at least, indeed I trust all, that furnish the answer He seeks, not only in word but in substance, to His teaching among us.

E.F.W. Is that seen in the number of times that the Lord refers to what is being said, and then adds "but I say unto you"? I wondered if that might be a particular need amongst us at the present time as persons may say one thing or another, but do we need to hear "but I say unto you"?

A.J.E.W. I am glad you extend that because it was very much in mind, the emphasis on "but I say unto you". That very distinctly calls attention to Him as the glorious instructor, the glorious teacher, but a teacher not only glorious but glorious in the total authority He possesses in reference to the teaching; and I wonder if there may be a need with us, particularly as we are younger, to see that authority lies behind the instruction that is in such a section as this. We must never leave out of mind the authority that is placed in the hands of Jesus.

E.F.W. Is there always a danger, when things in the world are as they are, with the overthrow of authority, that the tendency may affect some of us; but your stress that this is still a time of authority is I think very timely.

A.J.E.W. But when we think of that authority let us stop a little and ponder the glory of the Person in whom God has vested it, even Jesus. Let us remember what we owe to Him. Would we desire to come under authority in any other? Never! There is no authority to match the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it operates for the blessing of those under it, and for the increase and prospering of what is of God Himself in an unqualified way. The authority of Christ has an unqualified way of operation, to secure a fruitful answer in which God is glorified and yet in which the saints come into the choicest and best of divine thoughts. The authority is clothed in that sense with attractiveness in which authority is found nowhere else.

F.G.M. And yet it is a very practical matter, do you think? The Lord says "for your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matt 6: 32,33); it is very practical in every detail.

A.J.E.W. And, of course, you are touching something which extends over the whole of this glorious administration, that it is practical, it is real; it does touch and provide for the immediate detail of circumstances in which the saints may be placed, but does so from what we could speak of as the heavenly level. So that the simple practical things, which I have little doubt were in mind in the reference to the deportment, all come in. You might say that is a detail, but the dignity and heavenly character of an administration with its centre in Christ in glory is to come out in the very detail of the way in which those who love Him deport themselves down here. Was that in your mind?

F.C.M. Very much so, whether it be personally or as set together; and your stress on the authority of the Teacher personally is so important. Many things have come to us in valued ministry, but if they are the truth, which they are, I am to regard them as the

authoritative pronouncement of the great Administrator. Therefore in love they are to be binding upon me.

A.J.E.W. I am thankful you set that out; it is very much what is in my own mind, and I believe we need to see how those who have helped us, if we examine their ministry not in the spirit of criticism but as looking for what lies behind it, we see that they have held to the authority of Christ, and have held indeed too to the authority of the Scriptures, which is one aspect in which that authority is to be known.

L.A.B. I was thinking of your reference earlier to John's gospel and especially to that note in chapter 3: 36 (see note 'e'): it is submission to His Person. Is that not really the secret of these things? They are not just what is said, speaking reverently, but they involve subjection to such a glorious Person.

A.J.E.W. I am glad you put it that way, subjection to such a glorious Person, because, if we just pause to ponder who He is, what is our attitude going to be to what He may bring in by way of commandment and instruction and guiding?

G.W.E. Would each answering to the authority set on the greatness of the administration, and then set forward the glory of the Administrator in administration?

A.J.E.W. That would lend distinctive character and definiteness to all that is done; and as the authority of Christ is answered to the whole scene of activity will fit as being one; there will be no part out of joint because the authority is in one glorious Person. We might also say, in relation to Ephesians, that there is headship operating in one glorious Person, and that governs everything in the assembly as rightly undertaken. So that the administration is never marked by disputes or differences within itself. Alas, in governments among men in these days, we find constant friction between elements of those governments, I suppose never more manifest than at the present moment. One does not speak derogatorily of the powers that be, but the fact remains that among companies of men there is

continual disagreement and friction, but never in the heavenly authority in which Christ is supreme.

C.C.I. Does Matthew have in mind, among other things, that there is going to be severe opposition? I was wondering whether this section is completed with a man who had his house upon the rock, and the winds came and it withstood the pressures. Would that be in the Lord's mind that there is something here stable and firm that the enemy cannot overturn?

A.J.E.W. Hence it is Matthew who speaks of hades' gates. That would indicate the elements of opposition that you speak of, and you might say the root of them all; but the Lord says, they shall not prevail. He does not say that they will not be active but that they shall not prevail.

C.C.I. In that section, too, we get the thought of the rock; that is, it is stable and cannot be shaken. Is it going right through to the finish? We are right at the end of the dispensation. The Lord says "I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age", Matt. 28: 20.

A.J.E.W. Now what do we need to ensure this stability? How do we build our house on the rock?

C.C.I. Is it just what is in the Lord's mind in this legislation that is being administered?

A.J.E.W. I think it would be right to say that the legislation calls for a moral foundation in the souls of those who come under it; rather on the line that you are speaking, something is being built into us. We speak a good deal of the light and the principles of the truth - what is to be spoken of and needed to be spoken of and asserted - but they are to bring something of a substantial character among the beloved people of God, individually and as they gather, something that is morally formed and is not to be shaken.

F.N.S. Would the Lord have in mind, as recorded in the very last verses of this gospel, that if the disciples and those by extension down to this day taught what He had enjoined, there would be a

moral foundation built, and there would be no differences in itself essentially?

A.J.E.W. Very much: "Go therefore and make disciples", Matt 28: 19. That conveys something of a formative character working; it really visualises this great administration operating down here in the time of the Lord's absence, but contemplates, certainly by implication, the availability of power to give effect to that. You cannot have an administration working without power. There may be something, as among men set up on an official line, and it may not, alas, function for want of power; but the administration of heaven carries every element of power that is needful for its objects to be achieved. "All power has been given me", the Lord says, "in heaven and upon earth".

F.N.S. And there is, of course, a heavy responsibility on those who essay to teach, that if they teach whatever He had enjoined there would be the building up on a oral basis and a structure that is going to be fruitful for divine pleasure.

A.J.E.W. Hence the need of holding dear every divine principle. They enter into the constitution of the whole administration that is operating and will be seen, of course, in the world to come in its excellence down here. I always remember a word of Mr Taylor, that in the world to come God will produce His best in relation to the condition of things in this order in which we are. We shall then see the best of which this scene of things is capable. Another scene of things, a new heavens and a new earth, is to be ushered in, but God will show that, by His administration of things, He can secure the very best in the very scene in which evil has done its worst. I think that enlarges the scope of our outlook and gives us perhaps a greater sense of what faith would apprehend as before us in its reality.

H.P.W. Pilate thought that he had some authority, did he not? In John 19 he speaks to the Lord as though he had authority, but the impact of the authority that was vested in Christ Himself just showed where he stood, and that no authority can be had unless it be given.

A.J.E.W. The Lord reminds Pilate that if he had authority it was given to him, which is very salutary because, you might say, the divine administration embodies all these things, the powers that be included in the providential sense; it is operating for the furtherance of the interests of Christ and the strengthening of those who would stand faithfully in those interests. It is favourable to us. It is a great thing to see that whilst kingdom truth comes out in Matthew's gospel it is favourable to us; it is not in view of our condemnation, it is in view of a stabilised position in which we can be, knowing that God is favourable to us in all that He is working out.

Now I think we should pass on to Chronicles because the detail there is most instructive: "when the queen of Sheba saw the wisdom of Solomon". Well, how do we see wisdom? It would mean that there is something at once substantially apparent that reflects the wisdom of the One who is over it all, in this case Solomon. Most interesting history precedes all this, involving the preciousness of what is in view in David and the preciousness to God Himself of David's initial conception of the house, thinking for God as David did, and accepting the word from God that he should not build but that his son should build. Now we come to Solomon having built the house and the glory having come in, and we might say the service of God, what is peculiarly precious Godward, secured in activity, and we find Solomon with his peculiarly attractive and powerful administration at work, embracing all that has been effected. It is good to see the way that the person at the head of everything is emphasised. The house that he had built, his table, his servants, his attendants, his cupbearers, his ascent: all these things turn us back to Solomon, as if to show that the glory of the working administration reflects back upon the person who is at the head of it; and that is peculiarly true as calling attention to Christ.

F.M.K. Wisdom seems to have a great place here with Solomon; he asked for wisdom, God gave it to him. I was thinking of the wisdom given to Paul that the administration of the assembly might find a practical expression.

A.J.E.W. That is good; if there is one thing that we constantly need, especially in working out difficult matters that may come under our notice, is wisdom. I was very much stimulated and affected by a brief reference by Mr Raven to the Lord Jesus in which he spoke of Him as wisdom incarnate; that is to say, the whole supply and force of wisdom is in that glorious Person personally, in manhood. So that every element of wisdom in that sense can be learnt from Him - a wonderful thing which other scriptures confirm. But she saw his wisdom. I believe that is a great matter in the assembly, that things are working, and we see that wisdom is operating, and we trace it back to the glory of Christ as the great administrator over everything.

D.E.B. She says "Happy are thy men"; she recognises the feature of manhood operating in such an administration. Do you think that is something that we need to have in greater evidence? Things happen sometimes which, frankly, are a little childish, but that is not proper to the administration of heaven, is it?

A.J.E.W. It certainly is not, and therefore - I feel for myself, and it is something I have had to learn by reality of experience - we need to measure our words, and we need to touch these things as recognising the greatness of that to which they relate, and of the One to whom they relate. It would keep us very dependent in having to do, for example in our care meetings, with testing matters that sometimes come up. Let us keep the sense of what would belong to one of Solomon's men. The word 'men' which you emphasise is a fine word to use. They are not exactly called officials here, they are not ministers of the realm, so to speak, they are his men, and that is a very significant thing.

H.J.T. Is there something for us in the note to the word men? They are weak, mortal, Enosh, and yet that kind of man is happy in this glorious system. Would it help us to keep humble and yet be in the conscious dignity of manhood in the assembly?

A.J.E.W. Yes. I think that is a very fine point, that the balance in that sense is kept, that our own outlook and bearing is marked by humility, and yet along with that God is able to take a humble man

and bring him into a glorious administration, effectively and as perfectly suited to be part of it. That is a very wonderful thing and calls attention really to the truth of the glad tidings and the effective operation of the glad tidings in persons so that all that is immaterial to this glorious administration is shut out. You feel the need of the moral course of things in persons which Scripture sets out so clearly, and which those who have helped us have taken up so clearly and pursued amongst the saints, that these things all contribute to what was referred to - Solomon's *men*. David had his men too, but those were more the militant men, but these are men in the sense that they can do things in a way that depicts an administration of such glory.

L.A.B. Did not Mr Raven say that he viewed wisdom as resource? And is that not the secret of it, that what is seen operating can be traced back to the source from which it comes? I thought that was seen here in these men: you might say what kind of men they were.

Reference was made to what we are as weak mortal men and that is right, but what is coming into expression is the character of the men set out in perfection in Christ personally, do you think?

A.J.E.W. Yes; and of course the humble way in which the beloved apostle Paul refers to himself from time to time would abundantly show this. He says "less than the least of all saints" (Eph 3: 8), and yet in what context does that come? The most glorious expressions of the divine mind; there is the man who can take his place as one of Christ's men in the sense that you are speaking. Of course he had his apostleship too, the official side was there. When you come to Paul you get an impression not just of what he was as an apostle but what the man was as formed of God.

L.A.B. So that alongside of that he could say "Be my imitators, even as I also am of Christ", 1 Cor 11: 1. You asked where wisdom was seen, and all this is very challenging, at least I find it so, as to what is demonstrated; it is easy enough to see it not demonstrated in others but what is being demonstrated in *me* is the real test of it.

A.J.E.W. I am glad you speak of this as challenging. We need to be ready for the challenge of the truth and realise that unless we

accept the challenge we shall never get the benefit of what the truth has in mind to convey to us.

R.L. It will cause us to ask, will it not? If any lack wisdom, ask (see Jas 1: 5). So if we feel the need of it we are cast dependently on the source.

A.J.E.W. If there is a challenge which is of God we can be absolutely assured that there is like resource with God to meet it.

C.C.I. Would it be right to connect the scripture, Christ, as Son over his house, whose house are we" (Heb 3: 5), with this section in Chronicles?

A.J.E.W. Yes; now tell us more about it.

C.C.I. I was wondering whether the Lord has certain rights which He can assert at any time anywhere; those rights would be respected by us as the dignity of Who He is as Son is being asserted. Would that be right?

A.J.E.W. And, of course, He is Son over God's house. It stands related to God in His dwelling among His beloved people. It is what Solomon's house set forth. "The settled place of thy dwelling" (2 Chron 6: 30) - a fine remark which I often come back to as to Solomon's temple as we speak of it sometimes. Think of God having that in which He can dwell, not in any passing sense but in a settled place! I suppose, in the ultimate application, it calls attention to what is secured in the world to come and yet it has a real bearing upon us at the present time.

F.M.K. All these things that are seen express Solomon's wisdom - the food of his table, the deportment of his servants, the order of service of his attendants, their apparel, his cupbearers and their apparel, and his ascent, all culminating in the house of Jehovah. Is that a challenge as to how we hold things and do things and speak of things, because it has this end in view?

A.J.E.W. Yes; it is interesting as to that how very much in recent times the Lord's supper has gained a place among those who love Christ; it always has had a place through the revival but it is most

noticeable to me that in recent times covering the past few years, we have come to value the Lord's supper more than ever and to be expectant of what may flow out of it for the pleasure of God and for His glory; and I believe the Lord in His love would not allow us to be careless as to what enters into the Lord's supper. And when the Scripture says "But let a man prove himself, and thus eat... and drink" (1 Cor 11: 28), let us regard that in the sober way that love would give us to regard it; that we just get on our knees and see where we stand in relation to the Father, the Son, the Spirit and the assembly, and all that is proceeding in the Spirit here below. I think the proving of ourselves must involve that.

E.F.W. I was wondering whether the position that the queen of Sheba takes up would help her to see these things. We may ask, How do I see these things clearly? She comes to Jerusalem, but then it adds "and she came to Solomon, and spoke with him", not to him but with him. Is that something that would help us all to see these things clearly? We cannot see them from a distance.

A.J.E.W. That is helpful, and in a way, if I may use the word, very simple. How simple, in one sense it is, just to look to the Lord Jesus and come into His presence and ask Him things, and get answers.

We find how real the wisdom is. Have we not had experience of this sometimes in very practical ways? I am thinking of young people who may, for example, face employment problems which are very much in evidence at the present time, and such things. Can we not prove the wisdom of which we can have free disposal as we get into the presence of the Lord Jesus? I would like the simple, practical character of that just to get hold of us and affect the younger ones and the older ones - the older ones need it - that we know what the presence of Jesus means as profiting from all that is vested gloriously in Him by way of resource, as was said, in wisdom.

H.P.W. Would the Supper help us therefore, as you have indicated, to open up to our view the half that we have not really appreciated or known about? We might have known something about it in our short or long experience, but is the Supper the gateway which opens up the other half which is so blessed and glorious?

A.J.E.W. There is an expression which comes into a hymn: 'Higher and higher yet' (No.427), and that is something we can link with the Supper; we get something that elevates us more than ever before, and this is to be for God's pleasure, and it will be for God's pleasure as we find, through help in our souls, the substance that answers to what is opened up to us in Christ. The preciousness to heaven of what is formed after Christ in the saints by all the wonderful means that have been given us in the Spirit here, calling attention to the exalted Man, and in the experiences we have in the Spirit, and in the movements of Jesus: all these things are to be peculiarly formative in a positive sense. I am not speaking just of the repression of what is not in accord with the formation but the preciousness of what is after Christ being effectively formed in the people of God. Is that not a great matter at the present time?

H.P.W. I am sure it is, a most important one that we all should have our part in, young and old.

C.B. What does it mean: "there was no more spirit in her"?

A.J.E.W. It would mean that all that that woman had relied on was exposed to her. We do things sometimes without thinking of the basis on which we do them, but the basis needs to be laid bare, and she would go back to her ruling position with some understanding that all the premises, so to speak, all the basic things that she had relied on in her administration needed to be brought under review, and maybe abandonment or at least revision.

G.A.P. Would she require another spirit? Would that be the Holy Spirit as we apply it?

A.J.E.W. As we apply it that would be the answer, and of course this resource in wisdom in Christ previously referred to.

C.B. Henceforth she would listen and believe true reports only.

A.J.E.W. Yes; we get reports in character, maybe we get a word in ministry, we read a word in ministry, we read something in the letter of it. Now, what does that report convey to me? What does that report secure in me? Is it to remain in cold print? Because ministry in

the Spirit is not intended to be that way. You get it sometimes in black and white and you are very thankful for it, but the answer is, What does that become in me? Is there something by way of substance that God would secure in me by that word? This is the way, I believe, the queen of Sheba would be challenged, not perhaps overmuch affected, but she was challenged.

F.M.K. Instead of enigmas she said "Blessed be Jehovah thy God". That was something to take back to her ruling position, was it not?

A.J.E.W. That is right.

C.C.I. We get the thought in Ephesians of what is far exceedingly above all which we ask or think according to the power which works in us (see chap 3: 20). Would the queen of Sheba have a sense that there was something beyond what she had already experienced? Do you think the great service of the Son is to open out a realm of affections of which He is the centre?

A.J.E.W. Yes indeed. I think that is well put for us, to give us some impression of how the Lord might affect us this morning as to the glory of His heavenly administration of things which is in movement, effectively in movement, not a moment of time being lost. But then, shall we find our part and place in it as these different persons did that are referred to, these men as have been spoken of?

L.A.B. Do you think practically that we need to look at things more from the standpoint of the Supper in this regard?

A.J.E.W. Give us some examples.

L.A.B. Well, I always find the saints at their best on that occasion, and I always find that what comes from the saints is the best.

Whether we know what it is to relate to one another in our operations practically in administration to what is best is a challenge.

A.J.E.W. That is a fine point because sometimes, toward the end of the week, we examine ourselves under the Lord's touch. and we find that things are dropping a bit.

L.A.B. I believe if the Lord does come in amongst us on the Lord's day morning it is intended to give character to the week that follows.

We need not try and remember what was said but have hearts that can be affected by the way He presents Himself. Should we not in that sense move throughout the week in that direction?

A.J.E.W. And the fact that is so prominent as He comes in of who He is, and what in the glory of His sonship He expresses, is such that it is beyond words, it is beyond an act of remembrance in the mind, it is a question of the thing being spiritually reached and held all the time, is it not?

L.A.B. And as you said, it is at that point that we touch what is so expansive. Our administration so often gets down to almost points, if I can use that expression. The great thing is to have in our hearts the expansion of the glory of which He is the centre, do you not think?

A.J.E.W. I do not want, in speaking of it in the way I did, to make this difficult for the youngest lover of Christ here, but for each to get an impression of how glorious a Person He is - that would be something.

L.A.B. Going back to Matthew, persons are to have to do with the Father in secret. That is simple, is it not? You just go in and shut your door and have to do with the Father in secret. The power for everything that is outward is what belongs to what is inward and secret, and therefore you would encourage young persons to develop on that line of things, having their own secret links with Christ and with the Father, do you think?

A.J.E.W. That very much belongs to our subject, because the Lord in those remarks emphasises the need of definiteness as to it; that is, you are to go into your closet and close the door; you shut out what might in some sense interrupt or hinder, and then speak to Him. That is something we all need because time is very demanding these days, and we may have something in our minds that needs to be done and, I find anyway, it tends to disturb your liberty to go in to speak to the Lord and get impressions from Him.

C.B. Solomon's reign is characterised by peace, but initially when he was confronted with a problem he asked for a sword but he did

not use it. We have had the favour of fifty years of good teaching but do we still need to retain the sword to maintain the truth?

A.J.E.W. Yes. How much do we value the good teaching and that to which it leads us, and that which is really the theme of it all? What good teaching there has been! But I think there is a greater need to value it and to put ourselves in the way of absorbing it. Let us be definite in reading Scripture, reading what the Spirit of God has caused to be set out concerning Scripture, and find the substance that would result as it is worked out in our souls.

V.E.W. This queen was brought to a beautiful conclusion: "Because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever".

A.J.E.W. That is a fine conclusion. You long to feel that the working of administration in this order of things, in what we do together, has some such result as that. There is also the very interesting point: "Blessed be Jehovah thy God, who delighted in thee, to set thee on his throne, to be king to Jehovah thy God!" In the account in Kings that piece is not in, it is not there "to be king to Jehovah thy God!"; that is a distinctive Chronicles touch, if I may call it, emphasising that Solomon was under the eye of God Himself, as a fruitful one in His hand to take an administration so glorious. It calls attention to Christ, what is found in Him Godward, and that is very precious.

Now we might have a brief word on Ephesians 3. It is quite familiar ground, but it is needed as to what is established with the assembly manifestly in mind. The total administration is much wider, but the active point of it at the present time is the assembly, the Spirit here in the assembly. We often come back to verse 10: "in order that now" - the word 'now' is to be emphasised - "to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the assembly the all-various wisdom of God". We are in such immense circumstances in the assembly. It would be right to add to what we have said previously from Matthew, the point that the Lord's place as Head of the assembly must be kept in view in this epistle at this point. We prove the gain of His headship, not just of His authority which is there, but His headship, the intimacy of communication as

well as the resource in wisdom that we have spoken of, available to us to give character to what is found among us. I speak the more definitely as to that because I look back on a period of time when really the headship of Christ was sadly neglected by us. Love for Him would have us get back into the full experience of the Head of the body and all that it means in the working of that out.

F.M.K. Would men, and manhood, make way for that in the assembly at the present time? The apostle called over men, elders, who could carry this matter (see Acts 20: 17).

A.J.E.W. Yes; what those men must have gone over in their minds! I have often thought of those men, and Paul spoke to them as if to say, Now the position rests in your hands. And there is a sense in which we need a word like that. Some of our companies are small but we need to remember that we have a responsible part in reference to an administration which has its origins, its seat, in Christ in glory, and it is given efficacy by the presence of the Spirit here. There is something on that basis for even the angelic hosts to see, and that is a magnificent thing.

C.C.I. What does the expression mean: "the administration of the mystery"?

A.J.E.W. Does it not mean that the mystery is a divine conception, a range of divine thoughts of the most superlative kind, but which has to be brought into effect in something that is manifest and substantial under the eye of God? It is the administration that assures that, is it not?

C.C.I. I should like more help because we have the idea of Paul's understanding of the mystery. Is the administration of the mystery something that is functioning? It is active; it is not just an idea which gloriously, objectively, we can all understand through the Spirit, but it is something that is active under the Lord's own peculiar administration.

A.J.E.W. I am glad you set that out: you did it better than I did, because that is exactly what I intended to convey. It seems to me to be a magnificent thing to realise that in some sense so precious a

matter as the mystery can be working among us at the present time, and yielding something for the pleasure of God and for the hosts of heaven to discern.

MAIDSTONE

28 August 1982

Key to initials

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THE CHILDREN'S WORDS

One of the prophets, Hosea, actually prophesied for about seventy years as has been reckoned. He must therefore have been quite young when first entrusted with a message. At one time he called upon the people of Israel to turn to their God and said "Take with you words". He even told them what actual words to take and say to their God - words of repentance because they had sinned and had even worshipped idols. Of course their hearts had to go with their words or else these would be empty. The words that Jehovah Himself used were far from empty! He said "O Israel, return". His heart was truly revealed in the longing way in which He spoke and offered mercy.

Although we may not have bowed down to actual idols, big or little, it is astonishing how small a thing can rob God of our trust and our company. Some of the last words of the Bible to be written were "Children, keep yourselves from idols".

There were not good tidings only to Israel but also to us now. And we have a far more glorious gospel because Jesus has died and risen from among the dead. God has also given to us the very words to take when confessing sins and has even put them into mouth and heart. Learn the words of Scripture: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from among the dead, thou shalt be saved". There is no lower or higher age limit but the opportunity of salvation is for "every one whosoever". Perhaps you have heard of the unlearned stone-breaker who asked a passer-by the meaning of 'whosoever'. When told that it meant 'everybody' he said ' Well, the gospel must be for me then'.'

Martin Luther is recorded as saying once that 'Christianity is a matter of personal pronouns'. Older children will know from their grammar lessons what this means and it is true as far as it goes. Luther meant that it is not just that all people are sinners - but that / am a sinner: it is not only that Jesus is a Saviour - but that Jesus is

my Saviour. If you have by faith made it a personal matter in this way then your soul is saved for time and eternity. But you will always need a Saviour in respect of spirit, soul and body. Have you committed yourself to Him?

J.C.Evershed