

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

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Contents

INWARD STRENGTH BY THE SPIRIT

THE BROTHERLY LINK

THE CHILDREN'S UPWARD WAY

INWARD STRENGTH BY THE SPIRIT

Micah 6: 4; Numbers 21: 10-20

N.T.M. I wonder if the Lord is saying something to us in these days as to the need to develop power in our own souls for the last stages of the wilderness journey. We have the principle of leadership in Moses, Aaron and Miriam, in three aspects, but in the passage in Numbers, whilst leadership does not cease, it seems somewhat to recede. The Spirit comes on to view and the people journey. The brethren know the scripture well and these things have been said before, but I have wondered if the Lord may be reducing the hold which the principle of leadership in men tends to have upon us and raising the question as to whether by the Spirit we can make progress with leadership more receding into the background. Not that it is ever done away with; Moses goes through to the end of the journey. I think one can discern that the Lord may be teaching us not to rely over much on leadership in men. I thought we might first look at these three aspects of it in Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and then pass on to the scripture in Numbers.

J.R. What are the three aspects of leadership?

N.T.M. Moses represents authority especially, does he not?, which we shall need to the end, being what we are. We shall need to listen to authoritative ministry and bow to it, accept it. Otherwise a democratic situation could develop. The authority is in the word and moral authority is in persons who are clearly in the good of what they say. The expressed word and the terms of Scripture are authoritative. We should bear that in mind. Some believers have some what given up, and we may tend to give up, the authority of the word, which I think Moses would insist on, Moses giving the law.

A.McB. Would "the word of the lawgiver" in Numbers 21 bear on what you are saying?

N.T.M. It does. "The word of the lawgiver" - we retain the simple acknowledgment of the truth of Scripture and the statements of Scripture. We need that to the end. It is quite a serious thing to say,

I will be governed by Scripture. We may say it, but it is quite a solemn matter. We are to be governed by Scripture and we would expect one another, if something is clearly expressed in the Scriptures, to be governed by it. If I give up one scripture I shall give up a second and a third. We need to hold to these things, I am sure.

J.R. Would you also have in mind authority in ministry? There are accredited ministries which we are meant to value, based of course on Scripture. Would you include that?

N.T.M. I would indeed, ministries which the Lord has clearly been in and which have helped the saints in their time and which still help us.

J.R. The Lord opened the understanding of the disciples to understand the Scriptures, and ministry helps us to understand the Scriptures.

N.T.M. I am sure it does. If ministry is ministry it is from the Lord. We do not give up the inheritance of our fathers.

W.L. You could hardly expect normal spiritual development without being well versed in what the Lord has given us in an accredited way, could you?

N.T.M. I am sure that is so, and you would not wish to be without it. If you love the Lord, anything He has ever said is of interest to you.

Jas.M. According to the prophet Haggai these things remain: "The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and my Spirit, remain among you; fear ye not", chap 2: 5.

N.T.M. That is good. They remain and we are to abide in them. There is no development in that sense. John speaks of the tendency to go forward (see 2 John 9), the introduction of novelties. The word remains.

R.S.R. It says "I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam". Would that relate to the wilderness pathway where we are found?

N.T.M. I thought so.

R.S.R. You have said that authority is in Moses. What about Aaron and Miriam?

N.T.M. You tell us about them. This is not a oneman ministry. This is the whole point of a reading, that we do not depend on one, or two. Thoughts must be coming into the minds of the brethren as we are sitting here.

R.S.R. Would Aaron be the sympathetic, priestly side which we need?

N.T.M. It is the ability to draw near to one another, and the Lord is in that. It is needed. It is the form of leadership which helps the saints on, the ability to draw alongside and support brethren who have problems, perhaps with their children or with work, this kind of thing. You are thankful for a brother who will draw alongside of you and talk over your problems.

R.S.R. Young people especially have problems. Fatherhood is needed in that respect at the moment.

N.T.M. I am sure it is, a sympathetic ear, a sympathetic attitude. You will remember it says "This is that Aaron and Moses... this is that Moses and Aaron", Exod 6: 26,27. They are balanced. With authority, which is in a certain sense unbending, there needs to be the spirit of brotherliness and nearness, it being clear that if one is suffering you are going to take your share in suffering with Him.

R.S.R. They were able to co-ordinate: "when he seeth thee he will be glad in his heart", Exod 4: 14.

N.T.M. They met "on the mountain of God", Exod 4: 27. These two must go together, otherwise we get into a legal situation. Authority must underlie the position because we must do what is right, but the side of priestly leadership is a very real one.

A.A.B. When Paul writes some of his letters he links a brother with him.

N.T.M. When Mr Taylor began ministering as to the matter of unions, I am told that at a certain place he was in a house and met a brother who was also invited to the house. They were talking together and Mr Taylor asked him what he did for a living and he found out that this brother was in a union. This was the burden that was on Mr

Taylor's mind, and it is said that as he was speaking to the brother, Mr Taylor began to weep. The brother said to him, What is the matter, Mr Taylor? and Mr Taylor replied, I am just thinking of what my ministry might cost you. That, it seems to me, is the priest. He was faced with a person to whom the word of God would be costly. The priest enters sympathetically into it. That is a matter which has been revived amongst us to a large extent and it needs to be maintained.

A.C.C. Is there a certain normality about the three of them, the fact that there are three? Should what proceeds amongst us be a reflection of the economy?

N.T.M. That is interesting. I had not thought of that. I am sure that in these three there is a certain completeness. Have you more to say?

A.C.C. Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12, chapters that bring out the great truth of the body, both begin with an allusion to the three Persons of the Trinity. Do you not think that all that happens down here should reflect the feelings and sympathy and authority which are in the economy?

N.T.M. That is interesting, because it bears on what representation there is down here and amongst us, of the way God has made Himself known, whether it is testimonially to men or to other believers there should be some representation.

I thought with Miriam that it is not exactly the prominent side, it is more the idea of informal influence. Miriam represents leadership that is influential without being formal. The power of example can lead.

Jas.M. She gives a lead in singing in Exodus 15 (see v 21). Is that really an answer to what Moses had sung?

N.T.M. Yes, that confirms it. She affected the women; she gave a lead. "And Miriam the prophetess ... took the tambour in her hand, and all the women went out after her". She is influential. It seems to me that there are persons among us of whom it cannot exactly be

said that there is authority in a formal sense, but by their manner and bearing they are influential and in that sense it becomes a lead amongst us.

J.H. She just seems to go as far as the people have reached subjectively.

N.T.M. I thought that; she represents the state.

R.S.R. In many of our localities the sisters are the backbone of the assembly.

N.T.M. Yes, I agree. And the way, for example, in which they rule the house, without saying anything formally, is influential. Younger households growing up may well copy that, may well be affected by the way their chief interest is shown. Without any formal speaking of it, it becomes a lead. Whilst it includes us all it would relate particularly to the sisters because it is not formal.

J.N. Would that be seen in Mary in John's gospel? When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews with her weeping, Jesus wept (see chap 11: 33-35).

N.T.M. I think there is something in this reference to Miriam. It spreads tone and character. We have the idea in Paul's epistles that the younger learn from the older, not necessarily in any formal sense but we come under influence in a good sense.

J.R. In Paul's epistle to Titus he says: "that the elder women in like manner be in deportment as becoming those who have to say to sacred things,... that they may admonish the young women to be attached to their husbands... that the word of God may not be evil spoken of", chap 2: 3-5. Do you think it is that kind of element? The encouragement of that hidden side which is not prominent is very much needed.

N.T.M. Yes, it is a lead in a hidden way.

D.S. It is said of Phoebe that she was "minister of the assembly", Rom 16: 1. The note says, She did the needed service. She was "a helper of many" (v 2).

N.T.M. Yes. Therefore the effect of the way in which godly sisters move gives character to a place. Without saying anything, there they are. You see them in the meeting-room, their manner, their dress, their character, their bearing. And it should be so with all of us. We do not want to confine it to the sisterhood, but the side of leadership in sisters is by way of influence, not a formal matter.

D.L.S. That was seen very much in Naomi in the book of Ruth, to such an extent that Ruth said she would not leave Naomi (see chap 1: 16).

N.T.M. That helps very much. It is not that anyone sets himself or herself to be it, but what we are does affect others, and how I make clear what my interests are, where my dominant interests lie. It becomes an influence.

J.R.C. In Exodus 2, at a critical point in the life of Moses, it says "And his sister stood afar off to see what would happen to him" (v 4).

N.T.M. Well, she was a valuable sister; she watched over that young life.

R.J.C. Paul refers in his letter to Timothy to "the unfeigned faith which has been in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and in thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also", 2 Tim 1: 5. They were possibly not prominent sisters but there was a product in Timothy that had come down through these generations.

N.T.M. That is right. It is possibly more potent than we may think. It may not yield quick results but the bearing of it, I think, is lasting. We can all recall, I am sure, brothers and sisters by whom our lives have been influenced and moulded, and that is to be maintained.

W.L. It says of Elizabeth at the beginning of Luke that she was "of the daughters of Aaron", chap 1: 5. So the brothers are not alone in priestliness.

N.T.M. It is good to say that because we do not want to confine any of these features just to brothers or to sisters.

W.L. The important thing is that it says "I sent... Moses, Aaron, and Miriam". They were all under divine direction. Is that something we

all need to learn?

N.T.M. I am sure that is right. It is under control. If anything has really come from the Lord we should not have any difficulty in accepting it.

J.S. Would the households who supported Paul be on this line? They were sympathetic and supported what Paul was setting on in Corinth particularly.

N.T.M. That helps. It is remarkable too how at Philippi the sisterhood is brought forward - Lydia and the women at the river (see Acts 16: 13,14).

R.S.R. Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 carried in her spirit what was needed for the maintenance of what would be for the divine pleasure, secretly, misunderstood by what was official, and yet real and genuine in herself.

N.T.M. The day was very dark. You might say the lamp was just flickering, but something was nurtured and in time began to assert itself.

J.R. Would it be of significance then that in Numbers 20 Miriam died, Moses failed, and Aaron died. It is a question of what was in the people.

N.T.M. That is what I thought we should come to. I did not want to come to it straight away, because leadership does remain. But what you say is most helpful, Miriam dies, Aaron dies and Moses fails. It is as if the Lord would say to us that we may become too dependent on others. We may have tended to leave too much to others and sooner or later that will develop into a clerical system.

J.S-n. Do you think it does us good to keep in mind that each one of us exerts some influence? Should we be exercised that that influence will be for good? Would that carry over into Numbers 21?

N.T.M. It is salutary that we bear in mind that each of us exerts some influence. Take someone who regularly comes to the meeting: that is influential. You can depend on them being there, their presence is a silent voice. If my attendance is fifty-fifty and there is

no justifiable reason why I am not at the meeting, that, alas, is also a silent voice. We should be concerned that, unconsciously maybe, we do affect others.

J.N. You said that this is the end of the wilderness journey in Numbers 21. Could you say more as to that?

N.T.M. Well, the land is in sight. From this point onwards until they reached Jericho they were victorious in every conflict, but it seems that the principle of leadership had somewhat receded. I wondered whether, in the fact that even prominent brethren have failed, the Lord may be searching us as to whether we can nevertheless make progress in our own souls with the help of the Spirit.

D.L.S. At the beginning of this chapter it says that "Israel vowed a vow to Jehovah... And Jehovah listened to the voice of Israel" (vv 2,3). Is there just the element of inward strength coming into view?

N.T.M. A certain initiative seems to be developing with the people here. "Israel vowed a vow"; then in verse 17 "Israel sang this song". It does not say that Moses initiated that song. He did in Exodus 15, but here it is as if there is something in the people that is urging forward. It can only be power in our own souls. The Lord may use someone to give an address, but that is not enough in itself. What is outside of ourselves is not enough. There must be power in our own souls, by the Spirit.

W.L. In Romans 8 leadership is presented as by the Spirit.

N.T.M. Was there not a suggestion in the final ministry of Mr Taylor that the Spirit would be sufficient to the end of the journey?

J.H. In Ephesians 4 we have the gifts; then it leads on to the assembly as "self-building up in love" (v 16). Does that connect with your thought?

N.T.M. It does. The gifts, so to speak, recede and the body itself takes over.

A.C.C. The brazen serpent comes in early in John where distinct leadership is hardly in view. Does that bear on it?

N.T.M. I thought of John's gospel. As you know we have been taught that John the apostle does not enlarge on the power of leadership, rather he records apostolic failure. Even after the Lord was risen there was failure.

A.C.C. I wondered whether he provides samples in chapters 4 and 9 of people who could get along, we might say, on their own with inward power.

N.T.M. Yes. There are many references to the Spirit in John's gospel. That was very much in my mind. John makes more of John the baptist than he does of the apostles. He hides himself just as "the disciple whom Jesus loved".

J.R. Does this make way for Joshua eventually, which is Christ in the saints - formation? In chapter 27 Joshua comes to light. Moses is to go up to Abarim (see v.12) and Jehovah says "Take Joshua the son of Nun" (v 18). He represents that inward side.

N.T.M. I thought so. There are brothers whom we love and appreciate, gifted men, men who have helped us in the truth, but if they all went astray as even apostles do at the end of John, would I nevertheless be able to continue and make progress?

J.R. And in localities, if elder brethren are taken, would younger ones take it on?

N.T.M. The Lord may be teaching us, and perhaps brethren may be suffering for it, that we may make too much of gift and too much of leadership.

Jas.M. Have we not been taught that where there is failure in leadership things are maintained in the Spirit?

N.T.M. Yes. John especially decries anything official. The call is for personal attachment to Christ and the power of the Spirit here as known and enjoyed and maintained.

J.Mcl. In Psalm 32 verse 8 says "I will instruct thee and teach thee the way in which thou shalt go; I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee". Mr Darby seems to infer that that is characteristic of the wilderness journey, God guiding by His eye. Does that involve not

merely that He is watching how we are getting on but a sensitive readiness on our part to respond to His look? This does not belittle leadership but there is a touch from God Himself.

N.T.M. I would like to know more about it. It is such a sensitive matter: "I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee". The Lord looks and the message has come. It bears very much on headship.

J.R. The contrast is the horse or the mule which has to be tugged one way or tugged the other way. This is often our experience.

N.T.M. With the bit in our mouth! I have often thought of that. We have all seen a horse being pulled up by the bit and bridle. It is hard. But why should we be like that? "I will counsel thee with mine eye upon thee".

R.S.R. The Lord's unrebuking gaze would help us, and if we were in communion we would be sensitive if it were otherwise.

N.T.M. We may be having to learn what others have learned before. We tend to become too dependent on others, and it seems to me that the Lord is weaning us away from that. Hannah weaned Samuel. It is a fairly gentle matter, but the child is no longer entirely dependent on another.

R.S.R. One who leads should influence in power and leave his stamp so that if he were not present things would continue as if he were present.

N.T.M. I am sure that persons have had that power and have it still. We must come to this other side of knowing the Spirit for ourselves and proving that He is sufficient for the rest of the journey.

A.McB. We need to know the Spirit for ourselves as has been referred to in Romans 8, but is there too a sense in which we need to understand the Spirit collectively? This was a collective journey.

N.T.M. It seems that they sang together. There was spontaneous response to the Spirit. This scripture was very much before us in the 1940's. The truth as to responding to the Spirit and making more way for Him was almost the final legacy of Mr Taylor to us. The Lord

may be gently reminding us that we did not get the gain of it as we should have done.

A.T. Mr Taylor said in that connection, Let the types speak, emphasising the importance of giving place to the Spirit and addressing the Spirit.

N.T.M. Yes, "the scripture cannot be broken", John 10: 35.

R.S. Would it be appropriate to refer to another threefold cord in the Psalms: "Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name", Ps 99: 6? Samuel has a bearing on 2 Timothy.

N.T.M. That is interesting. Samuel's time is the time of the judges, a time of general declension, as in 2 Timothy.

J.H. Would the daughters of Zelophehad set out the fruits of the Spirit, how Israel had gained from the Spirit's service? These daughters expressed an earnest desire for an inheritance among their father's brethren. That should be our earnest desire, to get more and more into the great thoughts of God.

N.T.M. I think that is helpful. There is a longing with them. They wanted the inheritance. The urge for it was in them.

J.Sp. I was thinking of that in connection with Jacob, what he came to when he was named prince of God (see Gen 32: 28). It was something he had come to substantially. He wanted something and he set himself for it.

N.T.M. It is a good thing when the urge to answer to the truth rises in us, not outward conformity to it but actually to have it for myself.

A.C.C. Should the presence of the Spirit be something which we not only believe in by faith but which is a known reality in the experience of each of us?

N.T.M. I thought so. I remember Mr Wellershaus pointing out that, while this well was being dug in the desert sand, the sand would always tend to fall back into it. It is a constant matter, is it not? While the truth has been opened up for us, the maintaining of it

means we have constantly to deal with what would tend to quench the power of it and limit the effect of it. It is not something we can expect others to do for us. Are we able to judge rightly, or do we leave all judgment to others? Am I carrying things constantly enough that the Spirit's presence and power is sufficient in itself?

R.J.C. Does the Spirit come in to support and help us when we take a step forward in our own exercise. I thought of the way the children of Israel journeyed and encamped, and removed and encamped. They seemed to take a certain initiative. In verse 15 it says that the stream turneth and inclineth, as if the Spirit is coming in in support and giving direction as they make a move. As we dig and are in exercise ourselves, the Spirit comes in supportively, does He not?

N.T.M. Yes, I am sure that is right. We have to put off certain things and the Spirit will help us to do it, but we cannot expect the Spirit to do it for us. It is a question of having sufficient power and initiative and desire. Do we not want to see Christ as He is and to be pleasing to Him? I am sure every heart would want that day to be hastened.

J.S-n. Do you think it calls for definiteness of exercise? "That is the well of which Jehovah spoke to Moses". Can we come to some definite recognition of the Spirit?

N.T.M. Do you mean that we should be able to define things in ourselves? "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim 1: 12) is somewhat on this line. That is someone who is not content with what had been ministered to him, what he had learned from others, but "I know whom I have believed".

J.N. Is this a transitional period? Is it like the time after the Lord's ascension? You are thrown back on the work of God in your own soul independent of leadership. Leadership is not mentioned here.

N.T.M. That is helpful. In those ten days after the Lord had gone they were left without visible support, yet they stood.

J.R. Digging would involve exercise as has been said. They digged, then they say "Rise up, well!" They make room, do they not? And

then the water comes in.

N.T.M. That is good. We can grieve the Spirit. We can also act in such a way that He becomes increasingly free.

M.W. Do you mean that, as we were told by our brother in London, we should learn to quote ourselves?

N.T.M. There is a lot of truth in that. When the children of Israel came out of Egypt there was not a feeble one among them (see Ps 105: 37), and the journey is to finish like that. There is to be a tribute to the Spirit at the end of the wilderness journey, that He has been sufficient to bring the saints through.

R.T. Is that seen in Achsah who urged Othniel to ask for a field? Had she an appreciation of what was available?

N.T.M. "Give me also springs of water", Josh 15: 9. I think so. She urged him. It is a sorrowful thing that some believers currently make everything of leadership in man, and if that leadership was taken away no one could say what was going to happen. It seems to me that that is really an affront to the presence of the Spirit here in the assembly. I have to admit that leadership does tend to become too dominant with one, and it is a question as to whether the Lord might be saying something to us as to this.

W.L. What is your understanding of the unction?

N.T.M. It is collective, is it not? Does it not involve the oil rubbed in?

W.L. It says "and ye know all things", 1 John 2: 20. In the latter part of 1 John 2 we have John's warning about departure and those who lead astray (see v 26), and that we can fall back on the unction.

N.T.M. I wonder to what extent I know these things experimentally.

A.T. Is that not specially related to the children? It would be encouraging to the young people that John is addressing the children when he refers to the unction. The setting is anti-Christian, is it not?

J.R. In regard to your thought about leadership not being prominent, I wondered whether mutuality is to operate in this time. It says that

they removed and encamped, and it speaks of the well which princes digged, working together. Is that to be the feature of the present moment, not looking for anything outstanding.

N.T.M. Does it not involve that we work together in our readings?

J.R. And in fellowship meetings and 3-day meetings. If we do not work together, where are we getting to?

N.T.M. It is most important and there is a special responsibility on those who may be able to help the brethren, to set the pattern for it.

J.R. In fact I believe that for some time after 1972 there was a state of mutuality amongst the brethren such as possibly never existed before, but the enemy has taken note of that and he is attempting to disrupt it.

N.T.M. I think that is so. In 1972 there was a reestablishment of confidence.

A.A.B. In the song, "Rise up, well! sing unto it", no leadership is mentioned. There is the impression of each encouraging the other in the response.

N.T.M. It is the people moving. Moses is finally going to finish his service. The principle of leadership will remain, I am sure, but I think it may have acquired too much of a hold upon us and we may be suffering from it. The word which was in the book recently, 'Let the others judge', bears somewhat on this, as to whether we are developing in judgment or whether we say, Well, so-and-so has said it so it must be right. We should never do that or we may be led astray.

A.T. Would that make us Bereans?

N.T.M. Yes; to use another's expression, they were receptive without being gullible.

R.S. Would Peter be an example for us? He was an outstanding leader, but in his second letter he puts bondmanship before apostleship. In that epistle he says "holy men of God spake under the power of the Holy Spirit", chap 1: 21. Mr Taylor taught us that

the Spirit has the prefix 'Holy' characteristically. As we develop in holiness the Spirit would be more free, helping us to appreciate the holy sufferings of Jesus.

N.T.M. I am sure that is so. I am tested as to my liberty with the Spirit and the consciousness of His help, especially in a characteristic way. When we speak to the brethren we may be conscious that He helps us; it is like a fresh anointing. But I would like to be more aware of the Spirit being with me characteristically, in the journeying from place to place, and have the sense of the blessedness of the Spirit's power and life.

A.C.C. The blind man in Mark 8 had a second touch, which might involve the Spirit. He had his sight restored and saw distinctly, and saw all things clearly (see v 25). He did not see like that before.

N.T.M. He saw men as trees, walking (see v.24). We may have things out of proportion.

J.Sp. In Acts 20 there is a discourse by Paul. After Eutychus is recovered there is a change, he 'conversed' or 'communed' (see note to v 11). Would that be what would mark the end of the dispensation? It says they conversed "until daybreak".

N.T.M. That helps and it links with what was said as to mutuality, the ability to make progress in a reading together. I think Mr Taylor says there is a dispensational aspect to that chapter.

W.W. Twice over the children of Israel murmured about the water and blamed the leadership, but here where they work together the water comes freely and they rejoice in it. We may sometimes blame leadership if our meetings are dry but if we are in the Spirit the meetings would be more vital and interesting.

N.T.M. I am sure that is so. This is living: "Rise up, well!" Perhaps we get too much occupied with how we can grieve the Spirit, but there is a side in which we can actually forward His activity amongst us. "Rise up, well!"; it is almost an invitation.

R.S.R. In the world deference is given to princes and nobles. Should we give respect to those who are princes and nobles in this

regard. Is this how heaven regards them?

N.T.M. Yes, it is spiritual nobility. It relates to ministry we have had and how things have been made available for us and to us. We should get the gain of it and maintain the thing in its flow.

R.S.R. Mr Deck spoke in London of Mr Taylor's legacy. He said there was another voice.

N.T.M. Aaron's voice ceases and Miriam 's voice ceases. It is another voice for the rest of the journey. (See J.T. Vol.52, p.153 which enlarges on this). It is a human weakness that we like to have a man as leader.

J.S-n. In Romans 8 it says "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (v 14). Is that how we appropriate the Spirit inwardly, so that we prove what sonship is characteristically?

N.T.M. The matter of deliverance and the brazen serpent earlier in this chapter precedes that, "as many as are led by the Spirit of God". From this point on they make progress. The progress is from an inward state.

R.S. Mr Taylor made a point of the poetic language used in these verses. There is a harmony among the saints.

N.T.M. Do we ever speak to the brethren poetically?

A.McB. What do you mean by that?

N.T.M. It is generally thought that the prophets wrote in a poetic style. I think it is a refined way of saying things which touches the most sensitive chords in one another, bringing out the finer feelings and emotions that are in the work of God in the saints.

A.McB. Does that culminate in the Spirit and the bride saying, Come?

N.T.M. I am sure it does. I trust the reading might serve to make us more exercised personally to find inward strength by the Spirit to go on.

GRANGEMOUTH

15 May 1982

Key to initials

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THE BROTHERLY LINK

D.B.Bodman

Acts 9: 10-17, 24-27 (to "in the way"); Philemon v.16

I am just impressed, dear brethren, with the brotherly link. Our brother has spoken about life, the preservation of life, and I believe one of the things that the enemy has been so successful in is the disruption of the brotherly link. There is a need of it being preserved amongst us. We each know in our localities how little things come in and disrupt the brotherly link. I read here of Saul because he had an experience at the outset of his spiritual life of what the brother was; not only the brother but the brethren. Here we have Ananias; you can imagine his feelings. We have often been rather critical of Ananias but I wonder how each one of us would have been in the same circumstances if we had been told to go and see this man as Ananias presumed he was. He was a murderer, casting the brethren into prison, but Ananias is adjusted very easily and he can do as the Lord says. And when he comes to Saul he says "Saul, brother". I do not believe that Saul, later Paul, ever forgot that first touch he had with the brethren: "Saul, brother". And I believe that that link goes through everything; whether we are helped in one way or another, in the preaching or maybe in the exercise of gift, or in service, what needs to underlie it all is the brotherly link one with another. Of course the enemy is out to destroy it. We see how quickly Saul is brought into the assembly and how quickly the opposition comes in, a plot against him. But it is the brethren who let him down. He comes to appreciate his links in the brotherhood. These brethren let him down. And then he is brought to Jerusalem and they would not receive him to start with. You can understand why, looking at things from a natural point of view, but then a brother comes in and serves him, Barnabas brings him in and speaks to the brethren.

Then I just had in mind this slave who had run away, He had been a bondman. I think it is wonderful the way that Paul could say "not any longer as a bondman, but above a bondman, a beloved

brother". Well, that is how we need to hold all the saints, hold them all in our affections. How I need it myself I feel, because so often thoughts arise which are wrong in our hearts. Can we judge them and get through to what is truly the brotherly link amongst us?

LONDON

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THE CHILDREN'S UPWARD WAY

Read Psalm 124. This shows a quiet *consideration* of the gracious ways of God. "If it had not been Jehovah who was for us...". These believers might have been overwhelmed when opposed by angry enemies of the Maker of heavens and earth. We are reminded of the wonderful words of Paul: "If God be for us, who against us?".

Psalm 125. This brings *control*. "They that confide in Jehovah are as mount Zion". Any who might turn aside into crooked ways would have to answer to the Lord for it. To be upright in heart is not only right and a benefit to oneself but leads to what corresponds to "Peace be upon Israel". Think of the privilege of enriching the whole Christian company!

Psalm 126. *Contentment* is therefore known. "Jehovah has done great things for us; and we are joyful". There had been captivity on account no doubt of failure but it would be turned as the streams of the south country. Rain from the heavens causes the streams and ensures fruitfulness. Those who sow in tears on the dry ground will find that the rain from above will enable them to reap with

rejoicing. Even if our witness for Jesus seems like seed sown on arid soil there is the prospect of bringing in the sheaves with joy!

Psalm 127. *Continuance*. As the pilgrims moved onwards there was a deep desire to provide conditions suitable for God to dwell amongst them. "Unless Jehovah build the house, in vain do the builders labour in it". All things must be done in accord with the revealed mind of God. The Psalm speaks much about children because it is they who, if the Lord does not sooner come, will take their part in witness and not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.

Psalm 128 gives the *confirmation* needed as the believer goes on his way. "Jehovah will bless thee" is a gracious assurance to everyone walking in His ways. This Psalm also mentions the joy of grandchildren learning with their grandparents to be God-fearing, and finding blessing and peace.

Psalm 129 shows *confidence*. "Jehovah is righteous". In wisdom God allows His people to pass through sufferings often intense. He will deal with those who cause them. But a Christian believer, knowing God as Father, would not ask for vengeance. Do we love those who oppose us, as the Lord Jesus said?

J.C.Evershed

NB This piece appears in consecutive issues – see No 128 (November 1983) and No 130 (January 1984)