

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

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"STRENGTHEN THE THINGS THAT REMAIN"

Revelation 3: 1-4; Nehemiah 6: 1-9; Judges 6: 11-14

R.D.P. I was thinking of this expression addressed to Sardis as to strengthening: "strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die". We know there is what remains that cannot be touched, we thank God for what He has established that remains and Christ remains, the Spirit remains. I think the sense in Revelation, "which are about to die", involves our responsibility. One thing we need in our day is to be maintained in exercise. We cannot just assume that things are going to go on because they have always gone on till now, carried perhaps by those who are older; we need to be kept in exercise. These other two scriptures refer to two exercised men; one of them is exercised about the fellowship and one is exercised about the food supply.

J.A.P. What do you mean by exercise?

R.D.P. I simply have in mind that we should be maintained in divine things in reality in our links with God and our links with the Spirit, affecting the way in which we are vitally, especially in the local assembly. The dominant feature of the day is that everyone has gone to sleep: "they all grew heavy and slept", Matt 25: 5. We find that tendency in our own hearts - to go to sleep and leave things to others. Exercise involves that we take things on ourselves as with God especially in relation to the local assembly.

C F.D. So what characterises the last four assemblies addressed will go through to the end. Doctrinally we know that is true: but your concern is that in the day in which we live, having come through much in exercise which maybe has caused discouragement and disheartening, we need to be aroused to see that the Lord is going on with something and I want to be with Him in What He is doing.

R.D.P. Yes. So, as you say, these four assemblies - Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea - go through to the end, in the times when the overcomer comes into prominence. Three of them represent what is very sad, so you may say that three quarters of the

features that mark the last days are what is not pleasurable to God. We often speak about Laodicea and the side of imitation but we do not often speak about Sardis, but Sardis is Protestantism and we want to be preserved from that. He says "I have not found thy works complete before my God".

R.A. So what belongs to exercise is watchfulness; the Lord said "ye have not been able to watch one hour with me?", Matt 26: 40.

R.D.P. There is nothing we need to watch more than when things are apparently going quite well amongst us. The devil wants to steal and kill and destroy what is so precious amongst the saints. Here the Lord says, Strengthen it: "strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die". Now that is not what is secured in Christ; it involves that there are things here committed into the hands of men and women, things that have been passed down from generation to generation to our day, and unless we take them up in exercise they will die.

R.N.H. Would you say what is 'the truth'. John in his second epistle writes "to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not I only but also all who have known the truth, for the truth's sake which abides in us and shall be with us to eternity" (vv 1, 2).

R.D.P. If somebody said to you, Go and write down the truth you could not do it, could you? You cannot put a boundary round the truth and say that is the truth, for it involves the Person of Christ, it involves something which is in God Himself. The Spirit all the truth sustains (hymn 436). It is a very wonderful and dignified matter that we have to do with - the truth, that we have the Holy Spirit, the indwelling Spirit.

R.A. Behind the strengthening is there our discernment in relation to the movements of the enemy? In the second scripture they were building the wall but there were enemies trying to bring it to naught.

R.D.P. We could perhaps turn to that and just keep in mind the first scripture because Nehemiah was a man who says "strengthen my hands". I think that is very fine. He is not independent, in fact he is a man who feels his own weakness; and if you read through the

book of Nehemiah you find that attack after attack comes against him as he has to do with the building of the wall, which may relate to the fellowship. The wall is enclosing what is precious. The devil's attack today is on the city and the wall. I think the attack here, the final one I suppose it would be, was, Come down to the plain of Ono, come down to our level and talk about things, let us sort them out down here. Nehemiah says "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down". I think that is very fine.

J.A.P. It is remarkable that the Lord Jesus as a man was strengthened Himself, though not needing it as we do. It says that He was strengthened (see Luke 22: 43), in Gethsemane where the Lord as a Man was wrestling in relation to the will of the Father. If I am going to stay with the will of God I need strengthening.

R.D.P. Luke's presentation of the Lord in the garden is interesting in that it is different from the others; it is not Gethsemane in Luke, it is the mount of Olives, and we have been taught that it is pattern for us. The dependent Man is there in Luke's gospel the intensity of His feelings seen. His sweat falling as great drops of blood. But it is the mount of Olives a sphere that the Lord had recourse to, and after the strengthening by the angel He is rising up from His prayers.

A.C.C-m. Speaking reverently would the angel have to do with strengthening Him in His body? He was meeting Satan who was trying to deter Him from drinking the cup.

R D.P. It is after the Lord said "not my will, but thine be done" that the angel appeared to Him strengthening Him. I believe the angel comes in in relation to those who set themselves in relation to the will of God.

G.H. Would the enemy attacking the wall relate to the principle of separation?

R.D.P. I believe so. As we know, Ezra had to do with the altar; he set the altar on its base (see Ezra 3: 3). I suppose it would refer to what was going back to God. And here in Nehemiah are the exercises concerning the protection of that. The fellowship is involved in that, for it stands over against the world, over against

what is hostile. Yet there is something very fine about this wall because it is full of gates; it is not like Jericho that was walled up to heaven; a divine wall has divinely-appointed gates. In the recovery of the truth some of them have been repaired and some of them have been rebuilt. We could not go into all the teaching of Nehemiah but it is a fine book. They had mocked him, they were angry at him, then they questioned the validity of what he was doing. Then there came a point when he says "The strength of the bearers of burdens faileth, and there is much rubbish", chap 4: 10. We have known these things in our own exercises. Nehemiah had gone all through that and now there is this last challenge, the challenge of our day: come down to the plain of Ono, and the open letter. That is the feature the enemy is using at the end in our day, he would reduce everything down to ordinariness, and Nehemiah says "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down".

G.D.P. Sanballat says in chapter 4 "these feeble Jews" (v 2); we might look at things as feeble but if we have the right thought before us we will strengthen what is there.

R.D.P. Yes. I think we need to be exercised. The first thing Nehemiah did was to go round the city and see what was to be done. We need that in our places and to seek help from God to see what needs to be done. Nehemiah went alone. I think we need to go alone; most of us have been brought up in fellowship, we have been brought up in the most precious privilege but we need to be alone with God and get His thoughts as to the ruin the enemy has brought in and then commit ourselves to what needs to be done as Nehemiah does here.

C.F.D. I think that is vital; it casts us on God and tests our link with the Spirit of God to assess what is needed in a place; whether Birmingham or here, can we discern what is needed? Ezekiel was told to prophesy, God told him certain things to say, but then there were certain things he observed and he put a name on them as needing attention.

R.D.P. Yes, that is helpful; and he was a feeling man too; he had to feel something of the divine assessment of things. These men were like that. Isaiah was a willing man; he says "Here am I; send me", Isa 6: 8. I believe God loves to see that in all of us, especially in the young in the present day. But his lips had to be touched with the live coal from off the altar before he could be useful; he had to know something of what the death of Christ involved before he was to speak for God. I think that side of feelings comes out in Nehemiah for as he went to see the ruins he went through the valley-gate which would involve the feelings of God.

C.F.D. Therefore do you think that, to operate with God in our localities, we must be near enough to get the word and to see what needs to be done? I think you hit on a vital point here. So what the Lord is getting at in the locality is not promiscuous, it has some direct connection with the condition in the place, as in the addresses to the seven assemblies, there was something very specific that the Lord was able to put His finger on.

R.D.P. That is very helpful. So the way the Lord introduces Himself is vital to each of those assemblies. To Sardis He says, "These things saith he that has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars". The seven Spirits of God, we have been taught, involves the complete range of things in the Spirit, and the seven stars bears upon the responsible side in the assemblies, and He introduces Himself as the One who has those. It does not say here that the stars are in His hand for it is a day of breakdown, but He has them.

J.A.P. The Lord presenting Himself as having the seven Spirits would shut out local independence, which is the open thing, because He is speaking about seven Spirits here, the seven assemblies. He has to say to all the saints; we could not leave one out, even Laodicea.

R.D.P. Yes. So the seven stars bears upon the responsible side. The overcomer in these last four comes after the ear to hear. Earlier it is before, but in these last four the overcomers are those who hear what the Spirit says.

A.C.C-m. Thy works not complete in Sardis would answer historically to Luther's day; Protestantism began then and the works were not complete because he did not go on to the truth of the assembly. He brought in justification by faith but not the truth of Christ and the assembly, so his works were not complete.

R.D.P. I think so, Luther, and specially what was subsequent to him. If you do not go on to the assembly you end up in a clerical official system that is dead but with a big name: "a name that thou livest, and art dead". We talk about Laodicea but let us not forget Sardis or Thyatira. I think we have seen the danger even of Thyatira amongst us; what we have had to judge and leave has touched upon the awfulness of Thyatira - Rome. We can readily see the danger and that is Sardis. Some of the things that are said are interesting: "how thou hast received and heard". That reminds us of Paul's words: "What ye have... received, and heard, and seen in me", Phil 4: 9.

G.H. Would you say something more as to having exercise.

R.D.P. Take a father, think of your own exercises as to your children, they are not necessarily spoken or that the brethren know about them but God knows and you are before Him as to them. Think of the prayers that have gone up for the families of the saints, the prayers that have gone up for me! I was twenty years old before I came into fellowship but I think of the way that my parents prayed and my local brethren prayed. That is exercise; it involves that someone keeps at a matter with God and will not let Him go. We can see that in our own families, can we not see that in the whole range of things that God has committed to us in our day He wants us to be in exercise about them? So Nehemiah says "I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, whilst I leave it". Here it is the plain of Ono: "Come, let us meet together in the villages in the plain of Ono". From what Nehemiah says it would have involved that he had to go down to a lower level to have met them. You might say, Well, look Nehemiah, they are not attacking you by the word, they are not mocking, they seem to be quite reasonable. But he says, No, what I have before me is the greatness of this work. Now I think

we need that. There is a touch of spiritual dignity in it and you only get dignity spiritually as you are having to do with God.

A.C.C-m. That is how princeliness comes. Abraham was the first one to be called a prince, showing moral features rather than kingly.

R.D.P. Now Nehemiah had a good job. He was the king's cupbearer, he could have settled down here, but he is an exercised man and a praying man. He has his moments when he feels down, "Strengthen my hands", he says. I am just affected by that, he is not independent.

J.A.P. Nehemiah knew how to turn to God earlier in the book. He just prayed while he was before the king and I would judge that this "Now therefore strengthen my hands!" is an utterance to God in the midst of a conflict.

R.D.P. Very good; almost as if he keeps turning aside to God. That is a fine thing in itself. When the king asks him why his face was sad it is as if he just turned aside to God and speaks to Him. That is a very wonderful thing; Nehemiah was dependent all the way through. It was a tremendous task, the city was in ruins, man's unfaithfulness that had brought it about. What a subject that is as we look at it - the ruin of Christendom! But there were stones under the rubbish; thank God for that; what is permanent is there and he is able to work with that. Now let the younger people look at it; some of the gates were rebuilt and some of them were repaired. We do not have time to go into all that now but it is a very interesting book.

R.A. Divine righteousness comes into the building; that is where the goldsmiths were occupied.

R.D.P. The goldsmiths and the dealers.

R.A. The dealers and the perfumers too, bringing in the perfume of Christ.

R.D.P. What are these dealers?

R.A. They give the valuation of things.

J.A.P. What is the difference between rebuilding and repairing?

R.D.P. Some gates were repaired and some were rebuilt the sheep-gate and the fish-gate were rebuilt

A.C.C-m. One gate was neither repaired nor rebuilt - the water-gate; the omniscient personality of the Spirit does not need to be repaired. All the time of the breakdown in the Middle Ages His presence has been here. But the fountain-gate, that is the Spirit in us was repaired, but the water-gate was not repaired.

R.A. The sheep-gate has no bars or bolts on it, it is always open.

R.D.P. That is right. We have been taught that the sheep-gate and the fish-gate are what has been lost in the wreckage of Christendom and they had to be rebuilt. The sheep-gate involves God's sovereignty, and the fish-gate brings in the principle of the wideness of the gospel. Those two things that Christendom so prides itself on are the two things that have been lost. The rest of the gates were repaired.

In Judges there is another exercised man and he is exercised about the food supply. I think we need to be exercised about the food supply. Gideon did not have a good job like Nehemiah; he says "my thousand is the poorest in Manasseh" (v 15). The food was growing but the Midianites were stealing it all; as fast as it grew the Midianites took it. That is a very sad thing if it happens amongst the saints; you may have a good meeting, a good reading, good contributions and yet the Midianites come and take it all away.

C.F.D. How does that happen?

R.D.P. Midian involves what is social, and this feature will steal all food away and impoverish the saints. The people were suffering from a lack of food when there was plenty. But it was not becoming available to them because of the activities of the enemy, the devil. The devil will do anything in our places to stop the food supply; he will make me so that I will not have too much respect for you and consequently everything you say, good as it is, will be lost to me, it will not be food to me because the enemy has come in and introduced something that steals the food away. That is just a simple thing; there may be better examples. But Gideon says I am going to

do something about it. I hope we are all exercised about the state of things amongst the saints; and we can make things better by one man or woman. If others speak critically about the saints, do not you do it. Gideon starts in the winepress, in that enclosed area, to beat out some food for the saints. Now you might say, What is the use of one man amongst all these Midianites? What you find is that he provided a basis for God to come in and to deliver them. We need delivering from Midian in some aspects, I suggest to the brethren, because it is over against what is spiritual.

J.A.P. Likes and dislikes amongst us.

R.D.P. That is right; and we are all to some extent susceptible to it.

C.F.D. Personal preference can eat away at my spirit and my soul. So, as you say, it negates what the Spirit of God or the Lord might give at any given time.

R.D.P. I think so. What the Lord gives amongst the saints is very fine and we do not want to let it be spoiled. There had been a prophetic word from an unnamed prophet (see vv 8-10). It may seem rather a negative word, it goes over a lot of history, and God's word was "ye have not hearkened to my voice". For one man it was God's word.

A.C.C-m. He was threshing wheat, he was analysing the work of God and the chaff. When you go on with God you find a lot of chaff constantly in yourself. You have to judge that, to be constantly in the attitude of self-judgment and discern what is wheat, the work of God and of the Spirit, and what is mere chaff, what is worthless.

G.H. Tell us more about threshing wheat.

A.C.C-m. The wheat is the pure thing, Christ, the work of God and the work of the Spirit, what you may get by the Spirit. A sinful thought comes in, a carnal thought, jealousy. Well, you analyse it, where does it come from? It comes from the flesh and in self-judgment you mortify that. You get on your knees in prayer and see what thoughts have come into your mind that are chaff; they are worthless. I must judge that; God in Thy priestly grace cleanse my

mind, wash my mind. These are exercises we all pass through if we are going on with God, we have to be real. Mr Darby says, All thought of self is now forever o'er. Till the rapture we have self in us, but we have the power in the Spirit to deal with it, to deal with pride.

G.D.P. I was interested to notice that you said that Midian is the social side, but it comes in also in our business life that occupies us so much. It may rob us of what we get in the meetings.

R.D.P. I think so. These people had made for themselves dens in the mountains and the caves and the strongholds (see v 2), strong and secret places all over the place, wherever or whatever it is that would rob us and rob God. Our constitutions are affected by our food. There are parts of the world where men are starving and all kinds of side effects come from that. They are affected in their minds, in their thoughts, in their emotions. A person will almost kill someone for food. Even spiritually you can see how damaged relations amongst the saints will be if the food supply is not maintained. I do not think we realise how important the food supply is, a steady flow of good wholesome food.

C.F.D. God says "I gently caused them to eat", Hos 11: 4. We might have a good diet in front of us but I might be a sluggard and not get it up to my mouth. It seems to me that in the recovery we have had excellent ministries, and even now, in a day of small things when things are so broken, we still have good ministry amongst us, there is food. But how can we encourage each other to appropriate what we have?

R D.P. Well, you help us please. What you say is right.

C.F.D. Do you think a man like Gideon would set an example that someone can follow. For instance in our first scripture there were some who had not defiled their garments; the Lord said, Some of you have not done this, and He says, You will walk with me in white because you are worthy. Do you think the Lord is looking for an element like Gideon, which is that somebody is going to set something on, but then the responsibility is, can this catch fire?

R.D.P. We talk about persons walking according to God and perhaps He will show me. What a word to him: "Go in this thy might"!

J.A.P. What is "this thy might"? Is it faith?

R.D.P. I think it would be, and his simple honesty. He is not pretentious. In Sardis persons become pretentious; they end up with a name and no power and no effect and no product. Here is a man who owns his real weakness.

J.A.P. Every believer has a degree of light from God that he uses.

R.D.P. I believe so.

A.C.C-m. Specially if he is humble. There is a humility about Gideon and an intimacy: "Ah my Lord". Is that not a lovely expression? How near he was to God!

R.D.P. I think what you say is helpful. So here is a young man who is not concerned about what others will think but has his mind fixed; he has a very small area to work in, like most of us have, and he starts to work. All of us here have an influence, even these boys here have an influence on someone younger, be it good or bad, and we know that the influence of a man who is working with God is tremendous. He did not understand everything: "why then is all this befallen us?" You might say, Why are we so reduced in Plainfield and New York where for fifty years the most precious truth has come out? You do not have any great historical tradition in this country because it is a relatively young country, but what riches have come out in the testimony! And you may say, Why has it all befallen us? Gideon said, I do not understand it all but I am going on in my measure with the light that they have. I believe if persons really walked in the light they have God would give them more light and bring them into the fulness of His thoughts. We stop short because our faith is small and we find ourselves looking at ourselves and what is around instead of to God. Here is a man who was looking to God, because what he was doing naturally speaking was futile. One man in a winepress could not hope to combat what the Midianites were doing.

C.F.D. Do you think it is the man's committal? Nobody told him that he should thresh wheat in the winepress to secure it from the Midianites, but it seems that he was committed to something because of his link with God. Do we not need to have some committal? The Lord loves to see us like Nehemiah, loving the principles of the fellowship and standing for them; and I can love the food supply and commit myself to that.

R.D.P. I am sure it is most important. It is possible to come here just superficially for years and not grow, but a person who feels his weakness and is exercised with God to do something for Him in the place is worth a thousand mere professors. Gideon is the kind of material that God can work with to arrive at that state at the end when the Spirit and the bride will say, Come. That will be subjective; it will not be mere profession but be in persons like Gideon.

G.H. As was said, he was a humble man; that is a very important thing too that the Lord takes account of.

R.D.P. Yes. So it is an interesting chapter, and at the end of it he looks for confirmation from God; he is not pretentious.

A.C.C-m. Would it bear the application that you feel the need of life in your locality for the reading, for the ministry meeting? You want a word in life so you go into your closet in secret; "thy Father who is in secret", Matt 6: 6. You abstract yourself and cry to God - that you might have something living for the meeting; it is not enough just to quote scripture, you want the living mind of God for the moment.

R.D.P. Yes, and it is real. Sometimes when you have been preaching you may say to someone, Oh, well, we did our best! But that is not good enough. The preaching is one of the greatest services.

C.F.D. I think that is a vital thing. So in the preaching the Lord makes room. He brings in not only Paul but Silvanus and Timotheus and there are others that are being used; we want the best to come forward at that time.

R D.P. Yes; it is the expression of the heart of God coming out. We are not always as fresh as we should be. Through special circumstances at home we used to have the reading and follow on with the preaching. I do not criticise the brethren for that because I understand the circumstances, but the preaching may lose some of its distinctiveness. Perhaps there is the suggestion that the brethren are tired then so we just have a short preaching. No, the preaching involves the greatest service we can render. Let us desire some gift to be able to convey the glad tidings in a greater way: "Desire earnestly the greater gifts" (1 Cor 12: 31), not only to put scriptures together but to convey something of the heart of God.

G.H. It is the preaching of the word of God; that puts it on a very high level.

J.A.P. 2 Corinthians 4 is Gideon. Paul says "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus Lord, and ourselves your bondmen for Jesus' sake. Because it is the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine"; and then he says "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels , that the surpassingness of the power may be of God, and not from us" (vv 5, 6, 7). When Gideon broke those vessels the light shone; that is quite a test.

R.D.P. All these things are testing to us. We talk about things which often are far in advance of where we are, but at least we are keeping our eyes fixed upon what is right, not accepting the plain of Ono, that ordinary low level of things. Of course there are those who preach in spite of the limitations and circumstances which exist amongst the saints and we respect the way that they have accepted the charge, but then you cannot accept the fact that I have not been able to represent things as God would have it and leave it there. Be with God about it and perhaps He will extend gift in the preaching. We have to do with God. Someone said that gift is an impression of Christ. Otherwise you could not desire a gift, you could not desire the need to be eloquent or have the ability to be like a teacher, but "desire earnestly the greater gifts" really is that God gives you a distinct impression of Christ and the means to communicate it.

R.A. Is that "thy might"? In Zechariah Jehovah says "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit", chap 4: 6. He links the Spirit with the might. The footnote to 'might' is 'forces' and I think that is how the force of the Spirit becomes the power.

R.D.P. Very good. So Nehemiah knows there is no strength in himself but he says "Strengthen my hands!" Here Gideon says, I do not feel strong, my thousand is the poorest in Manasseh, but Jehovah says "Go in this thy might". Then God shows what He can do. We are having to do with God who can do things far above what we can ask or think. Now I wonder if we have faith for that, for that is what the scripture says (see Eph 3: 20).

A.C.C-m. "According to the power which works in us".

S.E.H. Does he also accept the position of being of the tribe of Manasseh? Ephraim is put first and Manasseh second and I wondered if Gideon would be in the acceptance of God's sovereignty in that respect.

R.D.P. Very good; he did not wrestle against that situation. God's sovereignty is an absolutely perfect arrangement. Why should I wrestle against it? God's sovereignty has given me a place whatever it might be and it is a distinctive place because the pattern He has planned will bring out glory in every part. I think what you say is helpful as to sovereignty; we need to accept it.

G.H. That is a very fine thought, that gift is an impression of Christ.

A.C.C-m. It is not ability to talk. The natural mind is to be dreaded in the things of God; we must depend upon the Spirit. If you have a good mind you can quote scripture and so on but that is not necessarily gift.

R.D.P. No. I never heard Mr Taylor but I understand that he was not the clearest of speakers but who could deny that he had an impression of Christ?

J.A.P. Your thought of gift is that the person becomes the gift. We say sometimes that so-and-so was a great gift to the church; we

mean by that that he was the thing; that is what I would covet, to be the thing.

R.D.P. I think that is important.

C.F.D. Gift is connected with the preaching, as you were saying. It has been emphasised that there are gifted persons and they should be used in the glad tidings.

R.D.P. There are difficulties of course due to small conditions and isolated circumstances but I think the principle is still there, and it lays extra emphasis upon this matter of desiring gift. I hope everybody is in exercise about that. I think the Lord may be saying to us at the present time "which are about to die"; that is, exercise must be maintained. It is not that the great thoughts of God will not go through, but we have seen places in our own time where once there was distinctiveness in the testimony and now, as far as we can see, there is no expression of assembly truth left. I believe that God would have us in exercise.

C.F.D. It is a real exercise because in our reduction and fewness and geography it is not always easy to call on gift all the time.

R.D.P. God never makes a mistake. If that is the situation perhaps we should ask Him what He has in mind for us in that. Maybe in some of the young men that we have amongst us for instance there is going to be something seen in them brighter than anything that has been in the recovery before. Have we faith for that?

A.C.C-m. Why have we given up the practice of one brother preaching on three successive Lord's days? It is scriptural. If he has the capacity and has a gift why can we not ask him three times?

R.D.P. The great thing is that things do not become formal or religious so that they are maintained in life. May we have a greater view of Christ that we may serve Him better, especially in the preaching.

PLAINFIELD

26 May 1983

Key to initials

(all local unless otherwise stated)

R Adams, Toronto; A.C.Clapham, Manchester; C.F.Dadd;
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ADDITION FROM AFFECTION

R.D.Plant

1 Chronicles 29: 1-5

I am just impressed, beloved, with what love adds, as David here says: "moreover, in my affection for the house of my God". There is a line to be kept alive amongst us, beloved. I think one of the distinctive features of Christianity is that it draws out more than what is prescribed, that is, you will give more than you *have* to give. Certain things are required of us in responsibility; there are certain things that we must not let go. How thankful we are for those who have discharged their responsibilities in relation to the house of God! Thank God for those in this area who in a sense have laid down their lives in relation to the house of God and in what belongs to it and the principles that govern it. But they were not just marked by that; I think there has been excess as well, the excess of love. Supremely this feature is seen in the Lord Jesus. In Numbers it speaks of the ark and its movements. The prescribed place for the ark was to journey in the midst of the camps, but it says that the ark went *before* them: "the ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them in the three days' journey to search out a resting-place for them", Num 10: 33. Beloved, that speaks of Jesus, the One who went forward in the wonderful love that marked Him to find out a resting-place for us.

Now in this scripture David says "Solomon my son, the one whom God has chosen, is young and tender". He is concerned for the coming generation and I think we need to be before God as to the next generation and especially those who are committed to the Lord and His interests. I believe there is cause to thank God for young people in this land who are committed to Christ and who are committed to the assembly. And, as David here, who says "Solomon my son... is young and tender", we are concerned for them too. We pray for them, pray for that "young and tender" line, possibly the final generation before the Lord Jesus comes. David says "Solomon... is young and tender, and the work is great; for this palace is not to be

for man, but for God". David had given much in his affliction (see 1 Chron 22: 14) and, beloved, there are those here who over many years have given in their responsibility and through conflict in abundance for the house of God. Thank God for it! It is all measured, it is all known; what has come down in a pure way, undiluted, gold for things of gold, silver for things of silver, wood for things of wood, iron for things of iron; distinctively these things have come out. But after all this David recognises that Solomon is young and tender and the work is great; and that is where we are today, beloved. So he says, I will give a little more out of my affection for the house of my God. I would ask the beloved brethren, especially the older ones, especially perhaps the older sisters who may have prayed all their lives, who, you may say, have given their all in relation to the testimony, I would ask them and all of us today to give a little more in affection for the house of our God that there might be a continuation of what is for Him and that the great work might be completed. There is nothing like the quantity here that you get out of David's affliction but the quality is the very best. Beloved, affection will add its crowning touch to stimulate those of us who are younger and especially those who are committed and perhaps stir up those who at the moment are not, that the work might be completed.

PLAINFIELD

31 May 1983

THE WATERCOURSE

A.P.Devenish

2 Samuel 5: 6-10; 1 Chronicles 11: 4-9; John 13: 23; Acts 3: 1-11

It is always an exercise, beloved brethren, to get up to the watercourse, involving the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. David said "Whoever". David's city, Zion, the stronghold of Zion, as we have been taught, would involve the place that Christ has acquired in the hearts of the saints. The trend in the scripture in Samuel is inward: "David built round about from Millo and inward". In Chronicles it is outward rather. I just want to speak a little about these two matters, what is inward and what is outward. In Acts 3 it speaks of the Beautiful gate of the temple. It must have been attractive in man's estimate, beautifully carved work, but a lifeless system, no power there to help this lame man: no power! He was there for thirty-eight years. The Lord would have seen him when He was here and yet He left him there. No doubt the Lord would be moved with compassion but would have in view that the power and effectiveness of the presence of the Spirit was to be seen. The man was really a witness to the impotence of the system once accredited of God but which had grown lifeless. "Old and aged", Paul says, "near disappearing" (Heb 8: 13) but he became an evidence or a witness of the power and presence of a divine Person here, administration in the hands of men dispensed in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

But in connection with the inward side Joab's name is not mentioned. I think it has been said that it is as if the Spirit hesitates in this verse to bring any one's name forward but David's. So we should hesitate, should we not, certainly about bringing ourselves forward. But on the inward side it is not so much a matter of bringing persons forward but Christ. So John does not say his own name, he says the disciple whom Jesus loved; that was enough. John 13 has in mind the building inward and John was in the bosom of Jesus content to be the disciple whom Jesus loved. That is a most

attractive side of the truth; we do not want to get in the way there. In the service of God we do not want to get in the way. You do not want to leave an impress of yourself at any time but especially in relation to the inward side of the truth. It is wonderful to see that the Spirit hesitates as if it would be unsuitable to bring forward Joab's name in this section, a section which is dealing with the inward side of the truth and which has in mind David's place in the affections of his people. So it says "David built round about from the Milla and inward".

In Chronicles it is rather the outward side that is in view and it links very much with Luke's writings. A priestly hand wrote this book and what is in view is the adornment of the outward position, the attractiveness of what was outward. As in Luke, the public position is in mind; they "wondered at the words of grace which were coming out of his mouth", Luke 4: 22. How attractive Jesus was as Luke the priestly writer describes Him! At the beginning of the Acts you get the position attractively adorned. So we need to be concerned about the public side. You say, It is in breakdown, ruins. Surely it is; we can be humble about that, but to what extent is the public testimony adorned by us, the Spirit of Christ seen? "Look on us"; what would they see when they looked at them? That is Luke's line. John, as we have said, is inward, and leads into God; "he came out from God and was going to God" - a great circuit, chap 13: 3. But the whole public position is in view in Luke's writings, involving that the Spirit of Christ was to be seen and an effective powerful testimony known.

So the writer of this book of Chronicles hurries on to David in the history. He goes back to Adam, as Luke does, but he hurries on to David to bring David forward as if nothing else was in his mind and heart; the rest was incidental. Sometimes we think the meeting is not going on very well until we have taken part, but everything is incidental here to the introduction of David. You would not want to get in the way, you would like to make way for Christ. Joab perhaps is viewed abstractly here because he was not up to the place he was given. The writer of this book generally does not dwell on failure; he

rather emphasises, where he can, what is valuable - priestly assessment you might say. So it says here that he renewed the city, or the outer city. I think it looks on to the future when the kingdom is to be restored, but it was prefigured in Jerusalem at the beginning. It can be seen at the beginning at Pentecost in Jerusalem, the city being renewed spiritually in persons. Everywhere you went in Jerusalem, after the Spirit came, there would be a wonderful testimony to Christ risen and the Spirit here. I suppose if you had been converted in those days you would have said how drab the synagogue was, how uninteresting were those Jewish teachers, the Pharisees with their long robes, long faces, long prayers. How different! What has happened in Jerusalem? The whole city you might say was alive because of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in persons. Well, the priestly writer brings forward remarkable persons in the beginning of Acts; remarkable persons in the upper room, a crowd of names he speaks about, heavenly personalities that graced the testimony. They did not bring shame on the testimony or bring it into reproach, they graced the testimony and adorned the teaching in what they were. Peter and John are persons who could say "Look on us". It was a wonderful time in Jerusalem. What a difference you might say in every street after the many were converted. There would be a testimony, a wonderful testimony as to what had happened.

Well what is it like in our cities, beloved brethren? In any sense is the outward position adorned by the Spirit of Christ so that we can say, Look on us? Could we say that? I do not think it is too much to suggest that there should be a public testimony that is attractive. Your house on the street should be different from every other house, the children that run out of it different from the other children. Think of the streets in Jerusalem, how different they would have been. You see demonstrated "the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" that Paul speaks about to Titus (see chap 3: 5). Washing of regeneration involves a certain cleansing, bringing the saints into what is altogether new. Never had there been anything seen like this before, persons walking in newness of life. What is seen? I am

concerned, beloved brethren, about what is seen. How is the testimony adorned? Is it brought under reproach by the way we live, our manner of life, or is the freshness of the life of Jesus by the Spirit seen amongst the brethren? What was altogether new was in Jerusalem: the new wine and the new skins were seen in Jerusalem, the new wine involving the coming of the Spirit and the new skins the vessel that was able to contain the Spirit and in which there would be a demonstration of spiritual power. We say we cannot claim very much but in Philadelphia there is a little power. There is to be some demonstration of the Spirit, of spiritual power amongst the brethren. So the renewal of the Holy Spirit would be in view. What was aged and traditional was there in Jerusalem and how inadequate it was to set out the testimony of God or in any sense represent Him. But how adequate the assembly was, as formed by the incoming of the Spirit, to present the testimony effectively and powerfully and attractively.

So Peter and John go up together - that is a fine reference - a kingdom man and a family man; they are together and they presented a witness to a wonderful administration of blessing. The kingdom of God has in mind God acting powerfully on man's behalf and for man's blessing. An administration is in their hands: "Look on us... Silver and gold I have not; but what I have, this give I to thee: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaraean rise up and walk". That is a wonderful thing as over against what is outwardly beautiful, what would attract man's attention and admiration, the Beautiful gate of the temple, but a temple that was lifeless. It is a wonderful thing to have the experience of the temple amongst us, beloved brethren, to sit down in the light of the temple and to experience the truth opening up and divine light coming in. Whoever gets to the water course: that is an exercise for every one. It might not be the most prominent brother or the most gifted brother but whoever gets to the watercourse. Mr Taylor used to wait often; he likened a reading to a fox hunt, who would get the scent? Often a brother's remark would bring a whole opening up of the truth to us - a wonderful thing that, to enjoy and to be astonished and wonder at the experience of the

temple in our localities. Whoever gets to the watercourse: who can bring in what will refresh the saints and what will bring about powerful deliverance from what may hinder the saints from having part in the service of God? This man walked and leapt and praised God. "And having taken hold of him by the right hand he raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God".

Well, beloved brethren, have we had the experience of these things happening? It may be that someone is not getting on too well, so we get to the watercourse, get the experience of the presence and power of the Spirit. Are we so occupied with our words, with how the brethren might be impressed by them? Do you put your name in there, in 2 Samuel 5? The Spirit hesitates, no other one but David dominates those verses: "David became continually greater". Is that not what we want in our local meetings, the Lord Jesus becoming continually greater? And then that there should be the ability and power to meet whatever may be needed to be met amongst us. The skins would suggest that, the new skins, the strength of the material, the strength of the vessel, the power that would be able to meet every matter that arose. When the Lord came in in Luke 24 they were confounded, frightened, it says. In the beginning of Acts, when the Spirit came, there is no evidence of any one being frightened, yet it was an extraordinary matter. He came as tongues of fire, the sound of impetuous blowing, the breath of God. You might say, Why were they not frightened? It was because of the material, the new skins, equal to the incoming of the Spirit and equal too to the conversion of so many. What would it be like in New York if three thousand were converted? What would we do with them? We would be so anxious, so disturbed. But the skin was equal, it would not burst, it was equal in an undisturbed way to take care of them. Such was the testimony at the beginning and in some measure such is it to be at the end. We have often been told that the mighty men in 2 Samuel are mentioned at the end of David's reign; in Chronicles at the beginning. There is to be heavenly

personality, persons who can say "Look on us" without presumption. I do not think there was any presumption with Peter and John. Could you say "Look on us" without presumption? There was something attractive there, a power that was effective. I believe, beloved brethren, we are to know something of these things.

One has not been able to say it very well but I can see a wonderful illustration in what was in Jerusalem at the beginning - the washing of regeneration, public sins being judged, persons cleansed. Ananias said to Saul "Arise and get baptised, and have thy sins washed away", Acts 22: 16. Washing of regeneration links with the truth of baptism. But then they were brought into what was altogether new. I think the life of Jesus was expressed in its freshness in these men: "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaraean rise up and walk", involving administration here operating effectively in the power of the Spirit in view of a man who was lame from his mother's womb being made to walk and leap and praise God. One believer told me that in the company where he is they leave out this word "leap" when they read it. I suppose others might put it in several times; but we need to leave it in and see persons rise above their circumstances in energetic response to God. Is the presence of the Spirit seen in your part to God, in my part to God? So much of our time may be taken up to impress the brethren but God is not impressed with that. What we should see in one another is the evidence of spiritual power. That is completely different to natural power. I think, beloved brethren, the element of reproach should be understood by us; reproach leads to the liberty and presence and power of the Spirit. Reproach even in the way in which we pursue the things of God leads to the power of the Spirit. So if we are slow getting off in a reading do not be too worried, get to the watercourse. We like everything to be just lovely but sometimes we need to wait in order that we should get to the watercourse: freshness, power and life that is in the Spirit. There is nothing like it, beloved brethren. It would be a shame to project yourself into such a setting except that there is this side of the public setting being adorned. I would suggest to the brethren that we think about how

we are seen - "Look on us". What would be seen? A good salesman perhaps; would something more than that, something of the Spirit of Christ be seen? Beyond what may be there externally in your vocation, your business, what would be seen? Oh, he is a remarkably able salesperson, a remarkably able administrator. It has been said that Jesus would not even have been a successful merchant. What could be seen beyond the physical side should be the Spirit of Christ that adorns the testimony. There is what is outward, it is the renewal of the outer city that one would suggest involves that the Spirit brings out in His freshness the life of Jesus in the saints. What can be seen in you? The pharisees would have their long prayers; it is better to have a short prayer like the man in Luke 18: God be merciful to me the sinner. That was not a very long prayer, he could not even lift up his eyes to heaven, he beat on his breast and said, God be merciful to me the sinner. He went down to his house justified. How would he appear the next day? I think the freshness of the life of Jesus is to come into expression in the saints. The outward position is weak and small and broken, and how we need to feel that; I do not know that we feel it enough, but with all that upon our spirits there is to shine through some expression of attractiveness and freshness of the life of Jesus. Romans 7 is that we are to serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter. If you are going to serve God how do you serve Him? Do we serve Him in newness of spirit?

I just suggest that we get to the watercourse in relation to what is inward, and that is a wonderful line of things; "Strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man", Eph 3: 16. We are to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge, we are to be filled even to all the fulness of God; a great inward line is to be experienced amongst us in the power of the Spirit. But then there is what is outward, how we are seen; "Look on us". The testimony in a sense has been put into men's hands. We are entrusted with something, beloved brethren, and in the Spirit's power there is to be what is effective among us so that a man can walk and leap and praise God. How often do we see it happen? Why is it that it does

not happen more? See a man delivered in your locality! See a woman like that woman who was bowed over for eighteen years get lifted up! The Lord speaks of her as a daughter of Abraham. Get lifted up, walk uprightly and serve God. How often does it happen amongst us, and why not? I believe it is because the Spirit is impeded, hindered, we get in His way. "Whoever", as if it does not matter who it is, in a sense it does not matter, but can we get to the watercourse and know the powerful movements of the Spirit of God amongst us so that persons are delivered, set free? One's desire is that we may experience something of these things and that they may leave some impressions in our hearts. In the Name of the Lord Jesus.

NEW YORK

9 September 1983

DEPENDENCE

A.Macdonald

(with Christ, 9 March 1984)

Revelation 3: 17; Isaiah 54: 1 (first phrase), 4, 5, 7 (last part), 8 (last part), 13; 55: 11 (first phrase)

It is just the simple thought, beloved brethren, of the need of being in absolute dependence upon divine help in whatever we may do or say in whatever circumstances we may be found. May we be kept and guarded from falling into a lukewarm state which marks the latter days. The Lord Himself would evaluate it: "because thou art... neither cold nor hot, I am about to spue thee out of my mouth", and I think that flows from an independent state. We have in another passage "I sit a queen, and I am not a widow" (Rev 18: 7) and here she says she has need of nothing. And yet the tremendous grace! One is touched in one's heart to think of the wonderful dispensation in which we are found, a dispensation of grace, and it has been extended even to our present time so that there is still time to repent. Because that was the word to Laodicea, and the Lord would bring in a word to open to her the reality of what independence leads to. She thought she had need of nothing but it only led to blindness and nakedness and these other matters that are brought in in this chapter, and yet the long-suffering of God and the appeal that the Lord would make to our hearts is that we might not be lukewarm. Paul's striving with Timothy was in view that he might be wholly in the things of God, and one feels the only safe place to be is wholly in the things of God and this would lead to the need of having the spirit of overcoming. So the promise is to the overcomers "Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking; if any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me". How gracious! What more could we ask for, beloved brethren? The promise is there to the overcomer.

So I just felt that the spirit of widowhood would be opposite to what we have in this state 'in need of nothing' and 'sitting as a queen and am no widow'. It is very difficult to know where to refer in such a book as Isaiah, he is so full. As we know, he prophesied a long time during four reigns ending with king Hezekiah. And I think we are in that time, the last time, and yet, thank God in Hezekiah's day one of the outstanding features of his reign was that he brought water into the city. One feels that in our generation - and one could say it humbly - that water has been brought to us in this city. May we value it more - the work of the Holy Spirit. The enemy is against it; that was the position which Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria sent, took up in Isaiah 36: "he stood by the aqueduct of the upper pool, in the highway of the fuller's field (v 2). Oh, beloved brethren, may we be on our guard that nothing may come in to hinder the present living stream of the supply of the Holy Spirit who is bringing the living water to us. It is a very real matter. May we keep the conduit open and keep the enemy away from it so that that blessed flow of living water may be vouchsafed to us in this city until the end of the dispensation when the Lord takes us to be with Himself; that is our blessed hope.

It is a wonderful thing when God intervenes. I do not think it is by chance that we have so many widows in this city; I think the Lord is speaking to us through it. May we get the gain of it, the gain of the spirit of widowhood. I believe the Lord would touch our hearts that we may take on the spirit of widowhood, a deeper understanding and a deeper valuation of our need of dependence on divine support. We do not find any support around us, it will fail us. We may have proved that; if you go for support to Egypt you find it will pierce you, and if you seek the support of anything in this world it will pierce us right through with many sorrows. May we find divine support where love never fails and where there is a never-failing source of supply as we rely upon the Holy Spirit and make room for Him to bring Christ into our souls.

Thus I just thought of two features that are brought to light in these verses. Just think of how God Himself comes in: "For thy

Maker is thy husband". Can there be any greater comfort than that in relation to widowhood? God is a God of the widows: "For thy Maker is thy husband: Jehovah of hosts is his name, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel". As we have been reminded by beloved servants of old, every scripture in the Old Testament points us to Christ. Oh, may we be thankful in our hearts that in our gatherings we may make much of Christ. He is our Redeemer and He has gone the full way. So this is a very full section of the prophet Isaiah. In previous chapter you get the sufferings of Christ; His death, His burial and His resurrection have laid an immutable basis whereby we can come into the joy and the gain and the buoyancy of what the prophet brings in life. So we are able to exult and break forth into singing and shout for joy. These are real matters. Then we have here too two great thoughts and would desire that we might make room for them: one is the thought of *teaching*. "All thy children shall be taught of Jehovah". I think that the understanding of widowhood and the more we are in dependence on divine support make way for divine teaching. We know what it has been in this city to have divine teaching amongst us. If we are to grow spiritually we need divine teaching. And then the preaching, as we have in the next chapter: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void".

O, beloved brethren, let us enter into the spirit of widowhood, not feeling that we know very much and have "need of nothing". May we be in humility and with contrite spirits and open hearts receive the divine bounty that would come to us as we are in dependence upon divine Persons and divine support. For His Name's sake.

NEW YORK

9 August 1983

EXTRACT

F.E.R. Referring to the question of gifts which we had before us last night, will you say what is the nature of a gift?

J.B.S. A gift is some distinct impression that the Lord has given of Himself. I gather the idea from the Lord's words to Paul: "I have appeared to thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen; and of those things in which I will appear unto thee".

T.H.R. And in it you carry out some grace that is in Christ.

F.E.R. Amongst us, those who minister are judged by it. A man is judged by what he can present of Christ.

(From J.B.S. Vol.6, p.293)

THE CHILDREN'S GOD

Read - "But now thus saith Jehovah, that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine"; Isa 43: 1. Now read it again with your own name in place of Jacob and Israel! You will thus learn the value that God places on you.

First He speaks as *Creator*. You must respect those who teach you at school even if they do not believe in creation, but always keep your simple faith that in the beginning God created all things. He has given you spirit, soul and body for His own glory.

Every believer has been born anew and God is the great *Former* of this work of new creation. It is this change that first makes us feel the need of a Saviour. In Jesus we find an object for the heart and a pattern for the renewed mind. It used to be said that God works with poor material in mankind because I suppose, man is a fallen creature. But the truth is that He works with the best of materials in the believer - the divine nature. It is a very wonderful thing that the Christian can be a partaker of this.

Then God is also a *Redeemer*. Can you say that He is yours? The Lord Jesus sacrificed "all whatever he had" to secure for Himself what is so precious to Him. Sins and the result in us of Adam's sin was a heavy burden which only the redeeming blood of Jesus could bear away from us.

Many a child may call upon God without realising that God had first called him or her. He is a *Caller*. For blessing He commands all mankind in every nation to "repent and turn to God". This is a broadcast call. There is also a personal call in the gospel. The child Samuel heard his own name called several times before he answered to the Caller. Are you like him? When he did respond God told him about judgment: He will be happy to confide to you His delight in Jesus.

"Thou are mine" is the cry of a triumphant *Possessor*. Later in our chapter He says "and I have loved thee". This is the gospel of

God. He rejoices in what He has won for Himself through the gift of His Son and the atoning work at the place of a skull. Do you rejoice with Him?

J.C.Evershed