

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 157

April 1986

CONTENTS

[RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN LOCALITIES](#)

[THE UPWARD PATH](#)

[SMALL AND GREAT](#)

[THE CHILDREN AS VESSELS](#)

Edited and Published by:

E.C.Burr

50 Red Post Hill London SE24 9JQ

RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN LOCALITIES

1 Corinthians 1: 4-9; 2 Kings 2: 19-22; 4: 1-7, 38-41

J.R. We have been considering elsewhere how we can provide more for God in our localities. It is an exercise that would appeal to every lover of Christ, that there would be more for Him in our local settings. Were all our faces set in this direction it would bring about a unified condition. We rightly need to be exercised as to having our own needs met, and the Lord would provide us with everything that would meet our need, but we need to get around to considering what is for Him and how there can be more for Him. What these scriptures point out is this, that there is the wherewithal in every locality to provide more for God. The verses read in Corinthians indicate what there was in the locality. I have no doubt that in these verses Paul refers to how he left them. He spent eighteen months at Corinth and in these verses he recalls what he had witnessed in the place; the testimony of the Christ confirmed in them, they came short in no gift – there was the wherewithal to face every responsibility in view of the pleasure of God. In the absence of Paul there had been some deterioration and that tends to happen in all our places. We no longer have outstanding men of gift and leadership universally; it is divinely designed that that should be so, but as a result of the Lord's activities in our localities there is sufficient to provide more for Him.

The scriptures read in 2 Kings indicate that there was a wherewithal in the place where Elisha was. He said, "Bring me a new cruse, and put salt in it". these things were in Jericho. He did not bring them, they were there and he simply made use of what was in the locality. Similarly, in the house in chapter 4, there was a pot of oil which the woman did not appreciate, but there was abundance of means of meeting every obligation and every responsibility, and living on the rest. Later in chapter 4 he said, "Then bring meal"; he did not supply the meal, the meal was there, it was in the place. I think we need to see that the Lord has been good enough to place in

our localities sufficient not only to meet every responsibility but to provide pleasure, and more and more pleasure for God.

L.MacF. That commends itself to the brethren, I am sure.

Underlying what you have said is the faithfulness of God. He is quite able to bring in persons to fill out what is in His mind. But what a delight it would be to find this amongst us locally! I am sure there is the exercise that things should be continued in life until the coming of the Lord.

J.R. Very good. Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth, and that was quite a long time for – Paul to be in any one place. He had in mind the establishment of conditions for God in the place. We have had abundance of ministry; we have over two hundred volumes of reliable ministry, we have five extensive reliable ministries. There has been an abundance of supply by the Lord. In this city you have known distinctive gift being in the place. What great extensive service there has been under the Lord! What a privilege to have such abundance of ministry! The need is not only to know the teaching in our heads (although we have to know it in our heads), but to be formed by what the Lord has given by means of distinctive gift which could be likened to Paul being in Corinth eighteen months.

G.H. I notice in this section the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" – the full Name – is mentioned. I wonder if that would have a bearing on what you have in mind.

J.R. It would. "Our Lord Jesus Christ" comes in quite often in this first chapter. It is a collective idea; "our Lord Jesus Christ" is something that we are in together.

B.T. There were many in Corinth but what you are saying would apply also to where there are only two or three.

J.R. Quite so. If it is a locality where the service of God proceeds, where there are persons that meet together unto the name of the Lord, although there are only two or three there is the wherewithal to carry things for the pleasure of God. Is that what you have in mind?

B.T. Yes. One or two brothers may not feel so gifted as they were at Corinth but there is the wherewithal, the Lord is with them.

J.R. That is right. They have their exercises but there is usually evidence of great dependence where there are only two or three.

Where there are twenty or thirty, or forty or fifty, in number, that is a great privilege, but it also brings its own exercises that maybe the two or three do not have in the same way. But the wherewithal is present where two or three gather "together unto my name", Matt 18: 20.

A.P.D. Is it of interest that in Acts 18 Paul was teaching among them the word of God (see v 11). Is that important? There is not only the teaching but he was teaching among them the word of God. That element should be in the ministry, the unfolding of the truth but the element of the word of God. Is that right?

J. R. . That is right. The word of God has its own character, and it is really the standard by which we adjust ourselves, judge ourselves, judge anything that is contrary to it.

A.P.D. It would affect the conscience and also the affections.

J.R. That is right. It is living and operative, sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates and divides (see Heb 4: 12). The word of God is meant to have an effect, as you say, on the conscience of us all, but also to result in some formation in affection and intelligence.

A.R.S. In the absence of outstanding gift, as it is in our locality here, we are apt to feel that things are very low, but it is encouraging to see that there is that in the locality which can be used of God.

J R Exactly. It requires committal on the part of each one of us to what is for the pleasure of God and to maintain what is according to His mind. You say there is not much in the way in the way of gift; there is sufficient anyway. We are not living in a time of distinctive gift, as far as I can see; we are living in a time when the ministry of distinctive gifts ought to have its result with each one of us, and it would be in the body functioning and a mutuality and brotherly confidence in working things out together. That is the kind of time

we are in. I am not saying there is no gift but there is not the same distinctive gift. Just as the apostles were given by the Lord at the beginning of the dispensation and did not continue, so distinctive gift in the recovery, as far as I can see, was not meant to continue, but we are meant to be the product of such ministry.

A.G.S In the absence of distinctive gift we should be more dependent on the Holy Spirit.

J.R. That is right. We come to that in 2 Kings 4.

B.T. I was reading something interesting, that if you do not know what to say in a reading as bearing on the scripture that you are reading, if you have a link with the Head you will be given what to say on the spot.

J.R. I am sure that is so, but what do we know about it? Does it work? It ought to be working more. I agree with what you say.

B.T. Does that link with, "If any one speak – as oracles of God", 1 Pet 4: 11?

J.R. Quite so; and that would depend on what was said about the presence of the Spirit and our being in contact with the Spirit. Is it not by the Spirit that the impulse from the Head comes, the Spirit in us actively? In Ephesians 4 we have mention of the gifts: "some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers" v 11). That obviously applies to the whole dispensation because apostles had a comparatively short time of service. The Lord provided for the whole dispensation and the ultimate result is "holding the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ: from whom the whole body, fitted together". The product of distinctive ministries is meant to produce this body feeling and body operating by contact with the Head by the Spirit according to the working in its measure of each one part. While the one body is a universal idea, Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 says "Ye are Christ's body" (v.27), that is the Corinthians; the character of the body was to operate in that locality.

It does not say, Ye are the body of Christ, because that is universal, but "ye are Christ's body", that is, the body without the article; it is the character that is to operate in our places.

B.H.W. Would it have in view the enrichment that is spoken of in this chapter, "ye have been enriched in him, in all word"? It has been said, I believe, that the first nine verses of Corinthians are like Ephesians, viewing the saints from the heights, what they have.

J.R. That is so. But I am sure Paul saw that in Corinth before he left it. He was eighteen months there and he would not leave Corinth deficient in any way: "in everything ye have been enriched in him, in all word of doctrine, and all knowledge, (according as the testimony of the Christ has been confirmed in you,)". He and those with him brought the testimony of the Christ into that place and there was confirmation of result in the locality. That is how he left them; his influence would no doubt have been felt while he was there, but his absence was the test. The absence of Christ is the test to believers at the present time, and the absence of distinctive gift is a test to us in our localities as to how we are getting on.

J.A.P. Is that why we get such precious things in Corinth? There is reference to the temple: "ye are the temple of God" (1 Cor 3: 16); then again: "when ye come together in assembly" (1 Cor 11: 18), and then in chapter 12 the body, as if Paul said, This will always exist. Is that what you are at?

J.R. Exactly. Paul did not want to go to Corinth; he wrote instead. If he had gone there he would have put things right, but he counts on the wherewithal in the place to operate so that things become improved. Most of our localities are like Corinth really, practically.

G.H. You mentioned that at the present time we do not have distinctive leadership or gift; do you mean that the Lord is looking for some definite result from all these ministries at the present time?

J.R. Exactly.

L.MacF. So there is the need of faithfulness, as in 2 Timothy where things are committed to faithful men. You would look for that –

brethren who are faithful to the light that has been handed on to us and faithful to our responsibility locally.

J.R. · Quite so. In that scripture you mention in 2 Timothy responsibilities and privileges come to "others also", and they have to become faithful men in order to pass these precious things on unimpaired to others also. That is how generations are meant to continue, generation after generation; it comes to us as "others also" and it is passed on as we become faithful men. Otherwise there is some deterioration and we do not want to see that, for if it is so, there is not more for God but there is less for God.

C.G. "Now I wish all men to be even as myself: but every one has his own gift of God: one man thus, and another thus", 1 Cor 7: 7. Is there a suggestion there that there are different degrees of gift?

J.R. Literally it applies to married and unmarried. What is in your mind?

C.G. I was thinking of gift, you mentioned gift before.

J.R. "His own gift": what other word could you use? His own grace, his own outlook, his own link with the Lord, I suppose. We can think of gift in different ways. We speak of gift as something sovereignly given by, the Lord in view of ministry or preaching, but gift in 1 Corinthians 7: 7 is the word 'charisma', that is, his own place, it is how he works things out for himself. One man thus and another thus, he says, "I wish all men to be even as myself" (he was unmarried we understand).

B.H.W. It refers to a footnote in Romans 5: 16 act of favour.

J.R. It is how we work out things in our own life. This refers to a man's private life. .

C.G. It also says, "Be not negligent of the gift that is in thee", 1 Tim 4: 14. That is something to think of too; each one would have something that could be offered to God.

J.R. "The gift that is in thee" in that context would be something distinctive given to Timothy. But then according to Romans 12 each one has been given a measure of faith that is gift common to every

believer; "a God has dealt to each a measure of faith" (v.3), and then according to Ephesians 4, "but to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ" (v.7). Each one has something in which to operate in the body. "To each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ", and it says in that same chapter "from whom the whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply, according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self building up in love" (v.16). So this gift of the Christ according to the measure given of verse 7 is the measure in which each one has his and her part in the body of Christ according to verse.

S.E.H. Are there different gifts that are in prominence at different stages of the dispensation? You made reference recently to the finishing touches that the Spirit is putting on the assembly. Would different gifts be prominent in that service compared to the early stages of the dispensation where there were the gifts of healing, and apostles which were meant to spread the glad tidings widely at that time?

J.R. I think what you say is right. At the beginning there were what we call sign gifts – healing, miracles and so on: these were used for the establishment of Christianity. We would not expect sign gifts today; we are in a time of what you refer to as the refining features of the Spirit's nearly two thousand years of assembly formation; and the operation of the body would be a part of that refining process, the body really functioning in our localities. We have different personalities; these have to be submerged in view of the operation of the one body and operating according to the measure of the gift of the Christ

B.H.W. What you say is interesting because quite a few believers, I understand, become involved in speaking with tongues now. That was a sign gift that was prominent at the early part of the dispensation. Would that fit in?

J.R. Exactly. We do not want to despise our fellow believers, we are thankful if they are believers at all; but as far as I can see, speaking with tongues makes much of self, that I have arrived at something. In any case what they speak may not be a known tongue. We need to have the outlook not what is for me but what is for God. How can there be more for God?

B.H.W. You spoke about it being a sign at that time; it was needed and had a purpose

J.R. There was a power there that could be taken account of publicly manifested at the beginning.

C.F.D. We are not in the time of apostles and prophets formally but is the element of prophecy ! he bringing in of the word of God and the mind of God? Is that what is needed to maintain the principles of the house of God locally, but too for the maintenance of life and vitality? Does that lay an emphasis on the meeting for prophetic ministry?

J.R. In fact it lays emphasis on all our meetings because we benefit more than we realise by actually coming together, by the influence of being in the company of one another. We are going to be together eternally but we gather in our localities now. Did you ever come to a meeting where you did not get something as you came expectantly?

C.F.D. I think if we come up in faith the Lord is always faithful Himself and He will provide us with something. Therefore is it in your mind that, for instance, 1 Corinthians 14 involves sitting down together and we can all prophecy one by one, showing how edification would come in – in the local reading or city reading, whatever it might be.

J.R. Exactly. The coming together is the evidence of belonging to one another. Paul speaks about the body involving "members one of another", Eph. 4: 25. Therefore there is a link with one another and that is experienced as we are together. It helps in unity, it helps in growing together in our places.

C.F.D. What you are referring to is interesting because it is really being let go and coming to our own; it is that atmosphere and that spirit; we are amongst our own and that should grow on us.

J.R. Exactly. So we come to 2 Kings, this incident in Jericho. "And the men of the city said to Elisha, Behold now, the situation of the city is good... but the water is bad, and the land is barren". These were persons who were exercised about conditions in the place; there could be improvement. I do not know any locality where conditions could not improve. This is the exercise of these men, whether they were elders or what they were it does not say, but they call Elisha's attention to the fact that things could be better. They are really saying, Things could be better in our place. What is the remedy? He says "Bring me a new cruse, and put salt in it". He did not provide anything, he only used what was there. "Bring me" he says "a new cruse, and put salt in it"; they were in the place and to be made use of. It is the idea of what is new, not the old thing, not the working of the flesh, not the working of the natural man, but what is new, what belongs characteristically to Christianity. And put salt in it; salt has its own character. You cannot imitate salt, salt is a product having its own character. It would mean for us reality. It is not imitating something else or somebody else; it is each one active in his own setting, you might say in his own measure. The Lord speaks about new wine in new skins; the new wine would be the teaching of Christianity and the new skins would be the constitution that Christianity builds up. The new cruse would be this kind of constitution.

T.E.D. I was thinking as to the spirit of Elijah resting on Elisha and wonder if that is not a further emphasis on what has already been said as to the value of the Spirit's presence at the present time.

J.R. Elisha has the double portion of Elijah's spirit. He said, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me", chap 2: 9. The double portion belongs to Christianity, it belongs to the firstborn; the family

to which we belong is "the assembly of the firstborn", Heb 12: 23. The double portion belongs to it.

J.A.P. I have been thinking of this city of Jericho for some weeks from the point of view that the elders were quite honest. This is what the need is in our city, and God helps when that is owned.

J.R. That is very important, I am sure. We need to be preserved from a complacent attitude. The enemy would give us a sense of complacency to hinder exercise in view of better conditions for God in our places; that is the exercise in Jericho. But they had the new cruse and they had the salt; it was a question of putting the salt into the new cruse and it was put at the source of the waters and they were healed.

C.G. "Salt then is good, but if the salt also has become savourless, wherewith shall it be seasoned?" Luke 14: 34. What would you say in relation to the savour of salt? It mentions seasoning; now if it is lost, what would constitute salt becoming savourless?

J.R. It shows that if salt becomes savourless nothing can make it salt again. Salt has its own character, its own feature, its own taste; it is distinctive, it is preservative. Paul in

1 Corinthians 5 speaks about leaven: "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, according as ye are unleavened" (v 7).

Leaven does not operate where there is abundance of salt. You cannot have salt and leaven operating at the same time. Salt might refer to self-judgment as we speak of it, but it certainly would refer to reality, the single eye, that kind of character. If that is lost nothing can make it salt again; that shows the character of it.

C.G. It speaks of it being worthless.

J.R. Exactly, it is worthless. That is what has happened in mere profession; I was going to say Christendom, but after all we are part of Christendom. Mere profession is savourless. It professes to be salt but it is savourless has not the real character.

A.P.D. The result is no more death or barrenness. We have seen a lot of sorrowful things happen and we would love to see fruitfulness

amongst us. How can we reach that? How can we be helped about that?

J.R. Have you any suggestion to make?

A.P.D. No. It is interesting to me that it is not only no more death but no more barrenness. It says, "He maketh the barren woman to keep house", Ps 113: 9. There is to be fruitfulness in our localities.

J.R. Where there is life there will be fruit, fruit for God.

C.F.D. Should there be the concern locally, as with the men of the city to whom you have referred, to search out for the cruse, search out for the salt? Would it be that in our localities we are trying to bring the best out of the brethren, we are trying to find and bring into evidence the work of the Spirit of God that has been going on, you might say, in secret. Locally should there be the line of manhood with us that makes way for that to come into evidence?

J.R. So the new cruse would go back to new birth, I suppose, the work of God. How can we get right down to the work of God in persons, how can we promote that how can we link on with that?

The cruse is new, there is nothing of the old in the new; there is nothing of the old character in new birth. In fact born anew emphasises the fact that it is altogether different, entirely fresh, entirely different from the old. There is no carry-over; difficulties arise when there is the carry-over of the old and not being true, as the salt would indicate, to the new.

A.S.H. What do you have to say further as to the source?

J.R. Is the source of things Christ as Lord and Head? Or do things come from another source? The source of new birth is God, it leads to being born of God, children of God. That is the idea of the new cruse, I think; it is what is proper to the divine family; it is new and nothing of the old in it.

A.S.H. The hymn says 'In Christ Jesus – new creation' (No 37).

J.R. That is just it. That is how we are going to be eternally, but the same thing is to work now in our local settings.

B.H.W. Would the new cruse be linked in any way with the inward man of Romans 7?

J.R. Quite so. "I myself with the mind serve God's law" (v.25) is the believer identifying himself with the work of God. The real 'I' is not according to the flesh, the real 'I' is according to God.

G.H. It says "Have salt in yourselves", Mark 9: 50. The prodigal went to the far country and in his misery it says about him: "coming to himself", Luke 15: 17. Would that be the work of God in the young man and the salt?

J.R. Yes, I think that is right. To me salt suggests reality, not just mere profession. Of course we are professors, but not, I trust, mere professors.

G.H. So that the salt was in evidence, it was real with him.

J.R. Exactly. It says at the end of that scripture you quote: "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another". What is the basis for peace with one another? It is not peace at any price, but there is peace in pursuing this line of more for God and what is new and what is real. So in chapter 4 we have the pot of oil. This woman was in a very difficult situation. In chapter 2 it is death and unfruitfulness and there is life and fruit, but here it is bondage, "Elisha said to her, What shall I do for thee? Tell me, what hast thou in the house? " There was something in the place that was the answer to the whole situation. "And she said, Thy handmaid has not anything at all in the house but a pot of oil". She did not have regard for what she had; she had not a true value of what was in the place.

The pot of oil would no doubt suggest the potential there is in the Spirit because this pot of oil filled every vessel available and it stayed. It is the potential we have in the Spirit which we need to draw from increasingly; we need to value the Holy Spirit.

B.H.W. We have had a lot of sorrow and reductions but what do we have in the house? We have the Spirit; the oil stayed after the vessels were all filled.

J.R. That is right. The vessels were all filled and the word was "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt"; that is, the filled vessels met every responsibility and then the oil stayed; there was still oil there. There is the wherewithal to fulfil responsibility in our localities and live; "Live thou and thy sons on the rest".

L.MacF. What is involved in the neighbours?

J.R. You are very neighbourly in these parts, I understand, as far as localities are concerned. It does not say a little pot or a big pot, but there is enough in that pot potentially to meet every responsibility.

As well as privileges in our localities we have responsibilities which we ought to face up to. Each vessel met each responsibility. The vessels were full, and the oil stayed; the oil was the means of life.

The man of God said "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt"; that is, the vessels were available to meet every responsibility. Responsibilities ought to be fulfilled; are they neglected? Where is the potential for taking up every responsibility? It is in the Spirit. I remember being helped years ago by the word. No matter how weak we feel that is always authority to act and the authority is the name of the Lord, the power is the Spirit and power will be realised as the authority is used.

J.A.P. It is a very critical thing here which we are all facing – the creditor has come to take the children. It is a serious concern in our land and in my own house, indeed, this matter of the children. She was feeling it too and the prophet was helping her through. I do not know how you would work that out but you spoke of the generation to come and faithful men. It would have been an awful thing for the children to go.

J.R. This woman is bereft: "Thy servant my husband is dead". She no longer has the support that she had counted on, she is left to her own resources. It is like our localities like Corinth in the absence of Paul, she has not that resource to count upon. But the resource is in the pot of oil actually in the house but not appreciated as it ought to be.

O.L.L. What would you say about the household? This woman is the wife of the prophet and do you not think she should have been exercised about something before she went to Elisha? The household should have known something about depending upon God.

J.R. That is true, but it is a pathetic scene here, she is bereft. She would normally have looked to her husband to take responsibilities but the responsibilities are left with her and she feels her insufficiency. It is quite a good thing to feel our insufficiency; in fact it is not so good for us if we think we are sufficient. She felt her insufficiency. And what was the answer? The answer was what she had available in the pot of oil; the potential there is in the Spirit in our localities, which means using the Spirit, drawing upon the Spirit.

C.S.E. In one sense the present time is the only time we will ever have and I think we ought to appreciate it more in that there can be dependence on the Spirit in us so that there is more formation for God. It could be that what is distinctive might actually not help the development as it should. I think there is no mistake in the ways of God if He leaves us as He does at the present time. I think it is for the development in the power of the Spirit of each of us individually so that there can be more for God.

J.R. What you say is perfectly true; now is the time to get to know the Spirit in the final refining time. We were saying elsewhere that it was towards the end of one hundred and twenty years of distinctive ministry that our attention was called to the Spirit, and now is the time to get to know the Spirit personally and to make use of the potential there is in the Spirit in our places. This woman is bereft, she is a widow. Have we not been bereft? Have we not lost many of our dear brethren who could have helped us and are no longer available? This kind of attitude of dependence and insufficiency would help us as attention is called to what there is: to the woman the pot of oil to us the presence of the Holy Spirit.

C.F.D. In regard to filling every vessel that is available, do you think that while we caught the spirit and the intent of the ministry regarding

the Spirit viewed objectively and response to Him, we are in the time now when the power of the Spirit of God should become a known thing locally, so that as each vessel is filled it displaces anything that is not of the Spirit? Does it involve that matters that are not according to the Spirit of God in our localities should come under our attention?

J.R. I think we have been more like Laban than like Rebecca. The servant came along in Genesis 24 and Laban said to him, "Come in, blessed of Jehovah! why standest thou out side? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels" (v 31). You say, What a fine locality this is. Laban is the leading man in the place making way for the Spirit. Is he? Towards the end of the chapter he is suggesting, Why all the urgency? Let us wait ten days, let us take it easy, let' us have our own ideas. Have we not been a bit like that?

Our attention has been called to the Spirit and we profess to respond to Him, but how is it worked out? Not as it ought to have been.

A.S.H. The woman went in the right direction. She could have gone to the neighbour seeking help but she went to the man of God.

J.R. The man of God for us would possibly suggest what the Lord is saying presently in ministry. What is He saying in ministry? I have been impressed with the fact that so much is said in ministry as to the Holy Spirit. I think that is one thing the Lord is saying to us very definitely.

G.H. Would you say something more about the Spirit?

J.R. Elisha, the man of God, would possibly represent what the Lord is saying at the moment in ministry, and as far as I can see in ministry the Lord is calling attention to the Holy Spirit and the need for us to be more depending on Him, and to experience what He can be to us in our local settings in responsibilities and privileges.

A.R.S. The sense of our insufficiency should not make us discouraged.

J.R. The Lord is pleased with that attitude. If we are complacent and think we are able for things, I do not think that the Lord gets much pleasure, but if we have a sense of insufficiency we will make way for the Lord helping us and we will make way for the Spirit helping us because we will be depending on Him. Lastly there is the man who shredded wild colocynths into the pot, bringing in of what is foreign. There again the man of God said "Bring meal". The meal was there. He did not bring it, it was in the locality. The burden I have is just to call attention to the fact that there is the wherewithal in our places to maintain things for God's pleasure.

J.A.P. In confirmation of that, in Luke 24, where the brethren were upset, they had something, they had the honeycomb and the Lord made much of that.

J.R. That is right. When the Lord said, "Have ye anything here to eat? " He meant, Have ye anything here for Me to eat. They had, as you say, and He ate before them. That is what the Lord is looking for, Have you anything here to eat? He would say, I have provided you with plenty, and so He has. We have over two hundred volumes of distinctive, reliable ministry. In spite of what went on in the 1960s, in 1970 we had for the first time in history every one of these volumes available as if the Lord was over all that was going on to provide us with such abundance of reliable ministry to build us up in view of our formation, not only in view of our knowledge, for "knowledge puffs up, but love edifies", 1 Cor 8: 1.

NEW YORK

28 April 1984

Key to initials

A.P.Devenish, Edmonton; C.F.Dadd, Plainfield; T.E.Druckenmiller, Plainfield; C.S.Elliott, New York; A.S.Hinkson, New York; G.Hesterman Plainfield; S.E.Hesterman, Plainfield; O.L.Linton, New York; L.MacFarlane, New York; J.A.Petersen Plainfield; J.Renton,

Edinburgh; A.G.Spooner, New York; A.R.Stevens, New York;
B.Taylor, New York; B.H.Waskey, Baltimore

THE UPWARD PATH

E. Palmer

Proverbs 15: 24; Colossians 3: 1-3; Genesis 5: 24

The Lord Jesus, I believe, spoke, as ever, in a most telling way of this path of life, speaking of the path that leads to life in contrast to one that leads to destruction, and souls were encouraged, and are still encouraged to enter the path of life. As we well remember, the gate into the way that leads to destruction is wide, but that which took a soul into the path of life, that gate was narrow. I believe it would be right to say that in that broad way there is room for every kind of thinking possible. Everyone can have his or her own opinion, and insist on it too! No one would demur; there is plenty of room there, but it does not belong to the Christian, to the believer. This way that is entered by the narrow gate, into the straitened way, is so narrow that there is room only for one will, and because of that, only one opinion. It is not man's will, either. I believe it is dominated, and narrowed up, so that those who are in it realise "what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God", Rom 12: 2. I venture to say, beloved, that that is surpassingly blessed. I suppose most of us have had the experience of doing our own will and finding the disappointing result of it. It does not work out; but I suppose most of us have had some sense, some blessed sense, of being governed by the will of God, doing what is pleasing to the Lord, with that sense of inward satisfaction of being agreeable to Him. I say that is most blessed, and moreover that path, as the Lord said, leads to life. I believe there is a correspondence with this verse in the Proverbs, where it says "The path of life is upwards", and if that path is upwards, it means that you and I, beloved, and together, are looking upward. Why should we look behind? Why should we be occupied with what is beneath, and with that which leads to what is beneath?

I believe that the work of Christ for us, and the power of the Spirit in us, would give us liberty to walk in this path, and the power for it too. How endowed we are beloved brethren! How liberated! It depends, no upon ourselves but upon God. He gave His Son and He has

given us the Spirit, both, that we may walk in this path that is upwards. I do not say that any of us are not in it, but I want to encourage my own heart, and yours, to walk in it; that is, that our lives are governed and regulated by what is upwards, not by what belongs to earth. The apostle Paul grieved about those "who mind earthly things" (Phil 3: 19); that is that the mind is occupied with them, and if the mind is occupied with them, we may be sure that the walk is affected by them.

So this path of life is upwards for the wise. What then is the object before the soul? I believe it is referred to in Colossians, "where the Christ is", the One to whom we owe peace of conscience and joy of heart, He is there, "sitting at the right hand of God", everything that needs to be done, done, and He at rest "sitting at the right hand of God". What an object for our hearts, to see Him sitting! Persons saw Him active on the earth. There was a time when people saw Him crucified; there was such a time. They saw where they put His body in the sepulchre. There were those who saw Him risen from among the dead. There were those who saw Him ascend. There were those to whom He appeared during those forty days, and to five hundred at one time. But the Spirit would open the eyes of our hearts to see Him sitting at the right hand of God. It has often been said that the position of the Colossians is that they are still on the earth but their outlook is towards heaven. Let us take it up, beloved let us really take it up. I believe it would have a tremendous effect in regard to our whole way of thinking. "Have your mind" how do we think? I believe it would deliver us from trivialities, beloved; engage our minds and affections with what belongs to Christ, which is eternal, substantial and real. "Have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth", whatever those things may be; not necessarily worldly things. There are lots of things on the earth that we must needs take up, but they are not to dominate our thinking. What is to dominate our thinking is the Person of Christ, "where the Christ is, sitting" as it says. He has completed all that needs to be done. Hebrews makes that clear. It says that God rested (see Heb 4: 10). It does not mean

that He was weary. It does not mean that! I say that with due sobriety. But He rested. He came to a point where everything was complete. He rested, and Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.

"Have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth; for ye have died, and your life is hid with the Christ in God". That is where our life really is, and yet we are still here. Do you think people would be different with such an outlook, with such a mind? I am sure they would. Every matter that is in this life can be brought to this wonderful position of things and get adjusted, regulated, and maybe brought into perspective by taking this place of having "your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth". This is written to the Colossians written to a company, which is a very interesting thing, as if there is only one mind in that company and that mind is in one direction and that mind has one object. Oh beloved: how often we have spoken about being found in unity together. It is not the kind of thing that is a hopeless objective, it is something that the Spirit of God would help us in, help us to arrive at, and to arrive at it in the divinely appointed way; not our way, but God's way. "For ye have died": every element that belongs to that man we are associated with that was terminated for ever before God at that cross, as we have died with Him, buried with Him, gone out of sight in that burial so wonderfully marked by what is vicarious. And your life, the real life of the believer, is hid with Christ in God. The people out there, in that world, do not understand it; of course they do not! But the secret is known in the Christian company, and I believe. the Spirit of God would help us afresh to take our directions from the living and abiding word of God.

I just touch Enoch, because he was a man who did it. Light is one thing, but an answer to the light is something else. The light must come first; you cannot work up to the light. The light comes in and I answer to the light. If I take a step, one step in relation to the light, God will give me more light. I have proved that – I expect most have – but if there is anybody who has not proved it, if you have light about something I say, dear soul, take a step in relation to that light that God has given you and He will give you more.

"And Enoch", it says, "walked with God". "Your life is hid with the Christ in God". That is where it is, and Enoch walked with God.

He was not a man who had no idea of what things are about in the order of creation that God has set up, those things we speak of as the institutions of life. He knew all about it; a family man, with family responsibilities, and yet he walked with God. In chapter 11 of Hebrews he is said to be marked by faith. It also says of him that "he has the testimony" (before his translation, that is while he was walking in this upward path he has this testimony) "that he had pleased God". Do you covet that? I covet that. I would like to be more conscious of what is acceptable to God in the practical working out of the life that God has given here in the testimony. It is a wonderful spiritual privilege when we can leave in our spirits the responsible side of things. We can leave it, but then in the light of what we experience in privilege we work out the responsible path, and it is upward. It is always upward and is a way that, once you commit yourself to it, is a way of no return. There is no question of going back. God has no pleasure in that. It is a question of going on. "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him". Is that going to happen? It surely is! The Lord Himself is coming. He will not come on to the earth, either, not when He comes for His saints. It will be above. It will be above things down here.

The dead in Christ and the living who remain will be caught up together in the clouds to meet Him in the air, (see 1 Thess 4: 17). It will not be on the earth. No, it is above, and there are persons who are in that path, upward, and the end will be the same as the end that happened to Enoch. He did not see Sheol beneath, "He was not, for God took him". I would just like to encourage our hearts together to make a fresh committal; not only to be in this path, but to keep in it. We can count on the service and the power of the Spirit to this end. I believe that God would give us a sense of that which is pleasing to Him, not only in the heart of the individual but in the hearts of the saints as they move upwards together. May it be so.

LONDON

31 December 1985

SMALL AND GREAT

E.C.Burr

"And he spoke of the trees, from the cedartree that is on Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall". **1 Kings 4: 33**

This is one of the verses in the Scriptures – of which there are many – in which a great range of things is covered in a very small compass. We have found that thought many times. The Word that was in the beginning with God and yet tabernacled among us: think of the range that is there. Think of the range of the form of God to the death of the cross. Mr Darby says more than once, referring to that range 'from the dust of death to the throne of God'. Think of the range of making purgation of sins and sitting down at the right hand of the greatness on high. Think of the range of the seventh month in the feasts where within five days you have to be able to compass afflicting your soul to the feast of booths and in the fiftieth year you have also to be able to encompass the feasts of the jubilee. A great range of things is called for.

Solomon here speaks of a very wide range. He spoke of the trees from the cedar to the hyssop. I think, beloved, that when Solomon spoke of the cedar he never forgot the hyssop, and when he spoke of the hyssop he never forgot the cedar. I think the Lord would encourage us in that and by that in the present day. The hyssop is something that is very small; we might say in some senses insignificant. At one point in the offerings it has to be cast into the fire. But if we think of it in relation to ourselves individually it represents ground that we all have to take, of being very small. It is a small thing, a small plant. It says "the hyssop that springs out of the wall". It seems almost as if it has just been able to find its home there. If we think of it, even in relation to what is collective and available to us in the present day, we are bound to take account of what is very small, very small. The diminution which we have suffered in the city, which affects us more recently with the departure to be with Christ of our beloved sister, underlines our smallness – in

a city of some eight million people, perhaps a hundred seeking to walk together. It is very small. The question is interestingly raised in Amos twice, "How shall Jacob arise? for he is small", chap 7: 2,5.

The Lord would impress us, I think, and allow us to be impressed with the sense of what is small in the present day. Things have become very small. In my own lifetime, in the area where there are now six breakings of bread there were twenty-six. Things have become very small. And we think around, and we think of smallness, we can think of localities where there is, as you might say, the minimum number of saints available for carrying on the service of God and assembly life at all, and yet even then there is a locality with no sisters and there are localities with no brothers.

Things are very small. We know of other localities where if a brother is ill, or his wife is ill, or both are ill, the breaking of bread ceases. These things remind us that things are very small. I think the Lord would have us impressed with this, beloved, how small things are. Solomon says in the Proverbs that there are things that are little upon the earth, and he refers to the ants who gather their food in the summer, coneys who make their homes in the rock, locusts that go forth by bands and the spiders that are in the palaces of kings (see chap 30: 24-28, A.V.). These things will all have something to say to us but they relate to what is small.

But the impression I have in relation to this verse is that Solomon's thoughts were not limited by what was small. Solomon's thoughts ranged to the cedars of Lebanon. As we have often been reminded, they speak of the saints in their distinctiveness and their dignity, and their greatness, and they belong to a land that is spoken of by Moses as "that goodly mountain, and Lebanon", Deut 3: 25.

That is the land to which the saints belong. It corresponds with the direction in which our beloved brother has been leading us, that there is a land where the saints are known in their dignity and their greatness, their availability for that house which was to be magnificent above every house. Think of that – the cedars of Lebanon that were to be brought down to find their place in the

house that Solomon built, which was going to be exceedingly magnificent!

The Lord would have us, I believe, while accepting the smallness of things, never to lose sight of what is so distinctively great. Think of the beloved saints; think of them as we gather in the city, what they have come through and the way they have endured in faithfulness, and the way, in spite of much infirmity, beloved saints continue to come on, and come on, and come on; and one thinks, as we gather at the Supper, that we see the saints there not in their feebleness according to the flesh or according to nature, but as we break bread together and the Lord comes in we have some impression of the saints in their dignity and their greatness. Let us, beloved, not lose sight of it. Let us, in remembering what the hyssop speaks of, and in taking that round, and consciously taking it, individually, consciously taking it in some sense collectively too (although what is collective can never neglect the greatest thoughts of God or of Christ in relation to the company), think also of the cedar-tree that is on Lebanon. What a distinctive place that is! It is not a place that is exempt from the operations of God in His ways.

His voice can shake these cedars. It is not exempt from the handling of God, if I may use such an expression, but the saints there in their greatness and dignity and elevation – beloved, let us look at one another like that. Let us take account of what is distinctive in men and women according to the working of God, and according in some sense to His counsel, the place that these trees have. As far as I recall, there is no trace anywhere in Scripture of man having planted these trees; I think they would represent what has come to light as the result of the distinctive and sovereign operations of God and we find it as we look at the work of God in the beloved saints in the present day. We must take account of smallness; the smallness increases. It seems that all the time one hears of one and another being taken to be with Christ. Smallness also increased, sorrowfully, by independency in a local gathering, but smallness impresses itself on us. But Solomon also spoke of the cedar-tree that is on Lebanon. How great it is! How great the saints

are! How great they are to God! One would covet to have God's view of every one of the beloved brethren. Would you not covet that too? Would His view of them be any different from your present view? Would you look at them differently if you had God's view of them? I trust not. I trust that we have some sense of what the saints are in this great and distinctive place that they have. Solomon is able to enlarge, his view enlarges very much. He spoke three thousand proverbs. Our beloved brother has drawn on them tonight for us, showing that the Spirit is in them and they are fresh for us.

His songs were one thousand and five. I do not suppose there has ever been another man. who wrote a thousand and five songs, and we have one of them. These things show the expansiveness that is in the mind of Solomon, that can come down to the smallest scale and yet work in relation to such dimensions as this. "He spoke also of cattle, and of fowls; and of creeping things, and of fishes"; he spoke of the whole creation. Nothing was left out of his view; he had the whole creation in his mind. He could touch it all. Beloved he could come down to the hyssop that springs out of the wall, take account of it and value it, but as valuing it he also had the scope in his mind to enlarge into these great dimensions which are touched in these verses. I believe, beloved, as we are together and the Lord works among us, and we know His presence among us (as we do), He is constantly seeking to hold us in the higher level of what His own thoughts are. His thoughts about one and another, and our own thoughts about one another coincide, and we are finding, as we ourselves are able to enter into this range of things, that what is externally very small yet from another point of view has a grandeur and a dignity which needs to affect us, and affect us powerfully, so that we are not overcome by smallness but we have some sense in our on souls of what greatness according to God is, and we see it in one another. We see it in the saints. We see it where there is seeking to maintain ground which is that of the assembly. We see it in those who seek to walk together in that way. Beloved, let us be sure, if the path of life is upwards, that our minds also are capable of turning from what is very small and insignificant (in one sense it must be insignificant} on the earth, to what is great and distinctive, and

powerful and impressive, and is going to be brought down (not with a view to its own destruction} to find its place in that magnificent house of God. Well, these will be very great things and the Lord would intend to have our minds lifted to the level on which He sees things.

While we accept the smallness of things we would have our minds lifted too to the elevation on which we are according to God. May the Lord help us for His Name's sake.

LONDON

31 December 1985

THE CHILDREN AS VESSELS

We are all familiar with the everyday use of vessels for containing a large variety of things, and the vessels themselves are designed for their special purposes. It will be equally apparent to the believer that in the holy matter of the blessings and services of God there need to be vessels which are likewise designed for particular purposes. Of such are persons prepared for "every good work".

Scripture speaks of "small vessels as well as the vessels of cups", so that the youngest of us can be made use of to carry refreshment to others. In fact the preaching of the gospel is in one sense a search for vessels – earthen ones! – to receive in particular the Holy Spirit and to become such as can pour out "living water".

As a sign of what divine power can do, John the baptist was filled with the Spirit from his very earliest days.

If we consider some of the young persons well written of in the Bible we find that they were vessels formed by the Potter to fill some special use. Miriam, for instance, was a vessel of care for one who was beautiful to God. We do not know what reward, if any, she received from Pharaoh's daughter for finding a nurse for Moses. But we do know that she was given by Jehovah a great part in 'nursing' His people in the wilderness. Later, David as a youth was a vessel of love in accordance with the meaning of his name. Not only was he attractive in his person, but his ways brought out the affections of others and even of unlikely persons. Scripture tells us that not only Jonathan, Michael and Saul's servants, as well as all Israel and Judah loved him, but also King Hiram and even King Saul at one time.

At a time of sickness in the house, the captive maid of Naaman's wife was a vessel of healing. Like the great Physician, she had no resentment against those whom, in the deep ways of God, she had to serve as bondmaid. It must have been a reward to her when her master returned from the river Jordan healed of his disease and then offered sacrifices to Jehovah. She could not go

back to her own country but she would have seen some of her own homeland soil which her master brought back! Then in New Testament times Rhoda was a vessel of joy to a praying household. The voice of the apostle Peter at the door so filled her mind that she forgot to open the entry to him. Maybe she had been converted by Peter and had taken every opportunity of hearing his word. Although now dead he yet speaks to us in his epistles. Is it a joy to you to hear his voice?

J.C.Evershed