

A
WORD
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SPIRITUALITY MEETING LIMITATIONS

BONDSERVICE

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

BELIEVING CHILDREN

SPIRITUALITY MEETING LIMITATIONS

1 Corinthians 11: 23-28; 15: 20-28; 2 Corinthians 11: 2

A.J.E.W. It is a matter of real experience that there are limitations attaching to the present character of the testimony, limitations that may prove irksome to us sometimes. Something impressed me this morning which leads to the suggestion of these scriptures. We gather for the Lord's supper in our several local gatherings, where the numbers may be small, which in a certain sense is a limitation; we think of our brethren all over the world who seek to walk in the precious truth, widely scattered, and their companies often small, with persons who are in those companies perhaps frail. Yet as the Lord came in this morning, the sense of limitation was lost, and what we entered upon together, and what we normally and rightly do enter upon together, is the place and portion of the assembly entire. I expect that we have all experienced that the sense of locality is quickly lost as the Son of God comes into His place in the midst, and the answer under the Spirit's touch then furnished to Him is from the assembly known not in a sub-divided condition, but as one vessel precious to His heart. It might be said that we enter upon that in each of our several localities, but in Spirit we touch complete thoughts, though not encroaching upon what is inscrutable. We have to accept that in what is to be known of God and His actions we must always allow in our minds for the inscrutable. It struck me that it would be good to inquire about this and perhaps give the Lord opportunity to free us from a sense of burden under current limitations a burden which the glorious activity of God's beloved Son and the sustaining power of the Spirit in the assembly are in divine love designed to meet.

The first scripture was read because the Lord's supper is of such importance as the doorway into experience in these things.

What is particularly noticeable is the care that the apostle takes to see that the Lord's supper is apprehended in its proper place, so that he says "I received from the Lord, that which I also delivered to you". It is something specific in character which he himself had received

from the Lord and which, discerning evidently its specific character, he had delivered to the saints; he conveys that this is a matter in the truth which is of the first import for us, that we take the Lord's supper and take it rightly. This scripture embraces the point that we take it rightly or worthily and not just as a kind of religious ordinance as sorrowfully it is with some.

In a day when the limited side is particularly in the experience of the dear brethren everywhere, I gain the impression that the Spirit would extend our view to complete things, final things, and give us to realise that saints gathered in the light of what the local assembly is according to God, provide a sphere of things in which the sense of limitation can be for the time removed and the saints brought into consciousness of what is complete and full according to God's mind.

F.A. There has to be a suitable state with us, so that we are restful in the assembly to take the Supper.

A.J.E.W. That is the import of what is here; this account comes to each one of us: "let a man prove himself, and thus eat of the bread, and drink of the cup". Of course the sisters too are embraced in that; it does not apply just on the masculine side. The Supper becomes the proving point in a positive sense as to furnishing those conditions of which you speak. The proving is not to exclude but to give us the realisation of going to God about matters so that we may rightly eat and drink. It is a proof of a peculiarly constructive kind to ensure that as each of us proceeds to the Supper, things are right and there is the condition that you speak of for the Lord to come into.

C.S.E. I was affected as you said that, when the Lord comes in, all sense of limitation disappears. I was impressed this morning with two lines of hymn 339:

'Thy peace, Thy joy Thou bringest here,
Our souls to bless, our hearts to cheer'.

One of the first things the Lord said to the disciples according to John 20 is "Peace be to you" (v 19); He Himself would be immediately the object before their hearts. That would help to set us free.

A.J.E.W. I think that is important, because in chapter 20 of John He speaks peace to them three times, twice on the first occasion and once on the second occasion; "Peace be to you". That is a vital point because there is much to disturb our minds; it may be in the circumstances of the world at large, the conditions in fact in which the testimony continues, or it may be in oppressive personal circumstances which in the wisdom of divine chastening in love we know, but the Lord's word is "Peace be to you". It is a very important point that the Lord is able in that sense to secure a secluded scene of things where He can produce the best and the richest in view of what was expressed in prayer, that there is currently an answer to the heart of God; that is a wonderful thing. It seems so pointed that in epistles which are particularly concerned with the testimony and the service of God in a locality, there is so much that lies outside the limitations of a locality and relates to the general position. The last verse we read is of that character; the concern of the apostle was to present those in Corinth ("present you" he says) a chaste virgin to Christ. The idea of the chaste virgin to Christ in the full sense can only attach to the assembly complete and entire and yet the concern of the apostle is to work out something in Corinth which in the fullest sense belongs to that, and bears the characters which belong to the whole glorious divine thought of such a vessel for Christ as a chaste virgin.

E.E.H. I was thinking of this idea of limitation. Do you think the Lord would give us a suggestion of it as He instituted the Supper after they sang a hymn and went to the mount of Olives? Would the mount of Olives involve release of limitations?

A.J.E.W. Tell us where you see the release.

E.E.H. They sang a hymn, that is something beyond the idea of suffering and sorrow and death and then they went to the mount of Olives, beyond the scene of death; it is a new sphere of things, is it not?

A.J.E.W. I think that touches exactly what we are speaking about. It would help us in our experiences because the atmosphere of hatred

to Christ was strong at that point, and yet what is done seems to be free of the immediate effect of that atmosphere. And much that you get in John 13 and onwards can be looked at in a similar way. Think of all that was building up in antagonism to Christ. Think of the traitorous betraying action of Judas going out, and all that was there among the Jews to kill Him. Yet the Lord in perfect composure sets out the most wonderful review of what belongs to this time of the Spirit, not allowing the contrarieties to hinder Him in the very least in what He brings in for the glory of God and the benefit of His lovers. I think the Supper is to become yet greater to us. I say 'yet greater' because the Lord's supper always had a prime place in the instruction given us by those whom God has helped. It impresses me with what I mentioned, that these verses in 1 Corinthians 11 are not just in the general course of the epistle; it is a specific subject which seems to be laid upon the heart of the beloved apostle to bring before the saints in Corinth in a fresh way, to remind them of their responsibilities in respect of it. He had committed it to them, and being committed to them it became a question of how they would regard and maintain the Lord's supper. I believe this is the clearest possible indication to us of the divinely-afforded doorway into the unlimited order of things in which the operations of God lie, and in which the divine affections are engaged; and the assembly belongs there. Sons belong there and we are brought through adoption into sonship, which is a proper portion for us. The doorway in is so often the Lord's supper. Do you find that?

A.B.P. Yes. I was thinking that the feelings of God find such detailed expression in the present period, but those feelings were there in relation to His people in limited conditions in the Old Testament when He spoke of Himself as Jehovah of hosts.

A.J.E.W. Quite so. That is a delightful touch; the prophets particularly refer to Jehovah of hosts. It is as if the prophet as with God gets a touch from Him to relieve the sense of limitation under which the prophets, very largely, were serving. Think of Ezekiel among the captives; the sense of limitation is there but he rises above the limitation.

A.S.H. "But let a man prove himself": would the perishing Aramaean (Deut 26: 5) have any bearing on that?

A.J.E.W. Deuteronomy 26 is a very instructive scripture to bring in because the offerer has to go over the ground. We have to go over the ground repeatedly. The man sets down his basket and then he has to cover the history, so to speak; he presents his basket eventually and he speaks to God himself, not by way of the priest.

An important outcome of that presentation is that the man with the basket of first-fruits finishes up the transaction by speaking to God himself, not by the intervention of the priest but with his own voice. It relates very much to what we are saying. In going over the ground, "A perishing Aramaean was my father", we realise where our origins were and how God reached us in those origins, and how He blessed us and brought us through. Maybe it was a long road of blessing, but He saw us through at every point. That is intended continually to affect the heart, and that Godward; the assembly is the sphere of things in which all these precious matters are to be entered into for God's pleasure.

L.MacF. So on the provisional side the Lord's Day is available to us. It says of John that he became in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (see Rev 1: 10), suggesting that that day was set apart. But then it is intended to get us in spirit into a sphere outside of time. I think we might need help as to that. Precious as the day is, we get beyond that, do you think?

A.J.E.W. There is a lot that could help us based on what you are saying. I do believe we need rightly to value the first day of the week; I am emphasising this in view of its positive character, that we may value the Lord's Day. Let us cherish with feelings according to God what that day is, a day which the Lord claims as being His, a day which being the first of the week is a day out of which other things spring. There is a certain originating character in the Lord's Day as to the assembly week and what may richly engage us - if I could use the word that is often used in natural things, that is to be exploited - that is to say we need to realise the possibilities and pursue them, and not let the day pass and engage our minds with

the things of the week, overlooking what the Lord's Day has meant. The Spirit would help us in those things.

A.B.P. Do you not think there is an indication publicly of that being set aside? We received a calendar at the beginning of last year from Europe and the Lord's Day was at the end of each week instead of the beginning.

A.J.E.W. It is often so, in Britain anyway, that calendars are presented that way, that is, the first day of each week is put as Monday. You have probably observed in reading airline timetables that day one is always Monday. It is just confirmatory of what you are saying that the preciousness of the first of the week is being set aside.

A.B.P. I feel it is timely that we should be exhorted in relation to that to hold tenaciously to it.

A.Macd. Paul refers to "the Lord Jesus" before he introduces the thought of the Supper, as though he is fully maintaining and holding in his affections the rights of the Lord.

A.J.E.W. And in maintaining those rights, the rights of the One whom God has made both Lord and Christ (as Peter would tell us) the personal loveliness that is His, Jesus, is included a wonderful blend, I think. It has often been spoken of rightly as an assembly expression, but it is very touching that there is allusion to His place of authority and pre eminence, but also to the place in which we know Him very near in the sweetness of experience as the lowly Jesus, the Jesus that the disciples knew moving among them with such simplicity and yet with such grace and power - Jesus. That is to arrest and stimulate the affections of the saints. The scene around us is terribly hardening. A good many of us here still go to work and there are inevitable contacts (I would use the word carefully) with that scene of things and they would always tend to dull our affections and sensibilities. But the Lord's supper and all that springs out of it is intended to build up those affections and sensibilities, which really are necessary to the full flow of assembly response, a magnificent thing, whether it is for Christ in answer to a

heart that finds in the assembly a vessel that is perfectly suited to respond to it, or whether it be to the Father in the company of myriad sons in unison under the leading touch of the Lord Himself, the One who is supreme in His sonship; whichever it be the active affections that the Spirit maintains are necessary if God is to have what is His due.

C.C.G. I think it is wonderful to know that we are moving on with the Lord, and when He comes to us on the first day of the week He can say to us, "Have ye anything here to eat?" (Luke 24: 41), and there is something for Him.

A.J.E.W. That is very interesting, "Have ye anything here to eat?", the Lord suggesting that something is to be appropriated by Him for His own pleasure.

A.G.S. The Lord has made allowance for us if our ox fall into the pit, to take him out, but in the main we should refrain from commercialism on the Lord's Day, should we not? That should not mark the brethren in a general way. There are times when there may be emergencies but our outlook should not be joined with that of the merchants.

A.J.E.W. The Lord will give grace in the working out of such a matter in detail, but let us remember that the day is His, and let the dear young people in a simple way regard that day as belonging to the Lord who is their Saviour, the One whom they have confessed and in whom they find true satisfaction for their hearts. Such an One claims that day; He would say, That day is Mine.

A.R.S. The expression of divine love in the Supper is calculated to nourish our affections and build us up,

A.J.E.W. And it acts by way of our minds. The remembrance is very important because the affections are in a certain sense reached by way of our minds and hold our minds, and the remembrance in that sense is something which is specially to attach itself to our affections, affections that are eager, affections, if you like, that are pent up. We have been with the Lord personally through the week, looking on to this occasion which His love provided in such moving

circumstances. On His way into death He tarried to give His beloved disciples the Supper to run right down through this day of the Spirit and become what we are speaking about this afternoon, the doorway into what is not subject to the defilements and limitations of the scene in which the testimony is, but stands related to the divine thoughts in all their fulness, particularly concerning the assembly.

The second passage was read because of the scope of it and the parenthetical way in which it is put, as if the beloved writer has an urge from the Spirit to make a most distinctive disclosure.

A.B.P. Does he not open up in this parenthesis the assurance he had in his own soul as he realised the possibilities that lay ahead of him as a Pharisee of the Pharisees? He set aside everything that he might win Christ; if Christ be not raised then we are of all men the most miserable; he had lost everything. 'But I have not lost everything' would be the parenthesis, would it?

A.J.E.W. That is a very fine way to put it. The chapter is a long one and a very rich one, and it seems extended in a way that would impress the dear brethren at Corinth: This is your proper portion, this is your proper engagement of mind and heart. The things that have had to be set aside, the things that the cross and the preaching of the cross have laid bare, what are they in relation to the divine glory and majesty which is disclosed in such a passage as this where the very power of language itself almost seems strained because of the vastness of what is before us? This is the portion of the assembly.

You could not read this with any sense of limitation lingering in your mind. You might have to go back to the limitation and face it in a right way with God, but the character of what is here is outside all the limitation.

A.B.P. The Father embracing Christ out of death was prepared to wait all those days before receiving Him up in glory so that the saints might get a confirmation of the resurrection.

A.J.E.W. Quite so. Hence the emphasis later in the history on witnesses, which is strong in the early chapters of the Acts "This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses", chap 2: 32.

That rightly enters into our assembly relations, I believe, because persons are affected in the sense of being able to witness to something, and being able to receive a witness to something, too.

A.B.P. This is not just opening up doctrine; this is a confirmation of experience.

A.J.E.W. Exactly so.

E.E.H. What we have in Acts 1 is therefore very important, the writer, Luke the physician, bringing in that the Lord appeared after He had suffered. It is very instructive to read that: "I composed the first discourse, O Theophilus, concerning all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach, until that day in which, having by the Holy Spirit charged the apostles whom he had chosen he was taken up; to whom also he presented himself living, after he had suffered with many proofs; being seen by them during forty days, and speaking of the things which concern the kingdom of God", (vv 1-3). For forty days they had opportunities of being with the Lord.

A.J.E.W. That would be largely experience in seclusion. Judaism is not in view in those forty days, Judaism is not raising its head against Christ; He is free, and you might say He comes and goes as He pleases. So that the later scripture in chapter 1 speaks of "the time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which he was taken up from us", inclusive of the forty days that you speak of.

E.E.H. Witness is what I had in mind, by persons who are able to give an account of the Lord after His death and resurrection.

A.J.E.W. Have not the forty days been spoken of as tending to promote spirituality? You feel that is something that enters so much into what we are saying; the Lord would give us the most favourable experiences to develop what is spiritual, in which what is of Him and what is for Him is to be entered upon.

A.Macd. The Lord's appearing to Paul would be a further proof. It fits in with what is being said about witness and proof. Paul himself had the living proof right there before him.

E.E.H. "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?", 1 Cor 9: 1.

A.J.E.W. What a proof that becomes when you think of what Paul had been against Christ! Think of the expression the scripture uses of him: "breathing out threatenings and slaughter", Acts 9: 1. That is what he had been; and you see what he became. It is witness to the power of the things of which we are speaking. It is such a man who is used of God to complete His word, that is to bring out and set forth for us the truth of the mystery of God "in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge", Col 2: 3.

E.E.H. Paul gives us the facts of these appearances of the Lord in 1 Cor 15: 5-8. There are appearances to this one and that one, and last of all, as he says, to me also.

A.J.E.W. Those appearances would have been so different, not a repetition of the same character of things but something fresh in each appearing. If I can use a very simple word to encourage the younger ones, it makes the assembly so interesting, the deepest interest of love. What is the Lord going to say to us tonight? What shall we learn of Jesus tonight? What shall we learn tonight of this order of things in the Spirit in which we can lose sight of the limitations? What keenness of expectancy these questions would arouse!

E.E.H. That would be the way to come to the meeting - in expectation.

A.J.E.W. We need that, I believe. Of course, to speak simply, there is the side of limitation which tends to impinge upon it; you have a busy day at work and you come home and you have a lot of puzzles in your mind that have come across the day with you and it becomes a test; but you look to the Lord and you look to the Spirit and you find that you get a touch of peace, and now you are ready for the assembly.

A.R.S. How would Paul's abstraction be entered upon? Mr Taylor and others have spoken of the power of abstraction.

A.J.E.W. I have often thought of Peter, who at a certain time in the day went up to the housetop to pray while the food was being prepared (see Acts 10). The touch as to the food makes it very practical; there were certain things in the day that were needful circumstantially, he had to eat and so forth. But while the food was being prepared he went on the housetop to pray. That is a kind of inlet to the power of abstraction; you take yourself away from the distracting circumstances and you look to the Lord in a definite way, and it is remarkable what you get. Do you not think so?

A.R.S. We need the Spirit's help for that.

A.J.E.W. And that help would make us deliberate and definite about it. That is what is needed to be deliberate and definite about it; there is a crowd of things waiting to be done, but you say, No, there is something else to be done first. You do not want to make it a legal matter, but a matter of the liberty we want to enter upon and enjoy in the Spirit with the Father and with the Lord in the access that we have by one Spirit to the Father.

C.S.E. In chapter 15 it says, "Then the end, when he gives up the kingdom to him who is God and Father; when he shall have annulled all rule and all authority and power". What time is that referring to?

A.J.E.W. I suppose it is defined by the expression in verse 24; "then the end". It seems to involve the ushering in of eternal conditions. The expression 'then the end' is without qualification, as if it signifies the finalising of the current order of things and the establishing of one that is altogether new and according to God.

A.B.P. Would that be the end of God's ways?

A.J.E.W. Yes, so that the outcome of them might appear in its glory. That last scripture could fitly just affect us a moment because it discloses to my mind a kind of background in the personal concern of the beloved apostle: "I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ". The chaste virgin is the assembly complete, entire, but the chaste virgin would have the features of virgin affection and chastity which attach to the assembly in the divine mind. The labour of Paul would have been to establish

the rights of Christ in this connection and so endear Christ to the saints that these features would appear, and that what came to light in Corinth would be fitting in such a vessel as this. But he does not fall short in his mind of the full divine thought in the completeness of it - "a chaste virgin".

A.B.P. It is the same thing in Ephesians; is it not, "the fulness of him who fills all in all", chap 1: 23? That must be the assembly complete.

A.J.E.W. Yes, indeed. I am glad you speak of that because if we think around the epistle to the Ephesians and the Spirit helps us, we see that again we have, addressed to a particular locality where certain conditions had existed and had been met, elements of the truth which really belong to an unlimited scene of things. It is a fresh proof of what the Spirit is able for, not only in the ministry of the word, but in the souls of the saints, to engage us with what is outside the immediateness of limitations. All this has in mind, as was said in prayer, at the beginning, that there should be currently an answer to the heart of God: "to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages", Eph 3: 21.

A.B.P. The "chaste virgin" calls for chastity which is maintained through constant concern with one object in view, the Man that she is espoused to.

A.J.E.W. Exactly.

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Key to initials

(All local except A.J.E.Welch, London)

F.Ashby; C.S.Elliott; C.C.Greenidge; A.S.Hinkson; E.E.Hoyte;
A.Macdonald; L.MacFarlane; A.B.Parker; A.G.Spooner;
A.R.Stevens; A.J.E.Welch

BONDSERVICE

W.Dickson

Romans 1: 1; Titus 1: 1; Colossians 4: 12,13; 2 Timothy 2: 24-26

I desire, beloved brethren, to say a little about bondservice. The deep interest God's people have in the work of the ministry is a matter of encouragement, how the movements of those who serve the Lord in it are thought over prayerfully with desire for the prosperity of the work of God. The service of the ministry is of great value in consolidating the present operations of the Spirit but, along with that, there is a bondservice which is a much needed service amongst the saints universally. Bondservice involves the committal in love to divine interests in our localities and to the testimony generally. In Scripture it always implies love, love for the testimony and love for the saints, and the ability to work it out in a practical way.

I would like to point out to begin with how every great phase in the testimony has been marked at its outset by this feature of

bondservice. You will recall that, after the law was given in Exodus 20, it was immediately followed by the instruction as to the Hebrew servant, bringing out the great feature of love as it was seen in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Hebrew bondman and the love that marked him was the filling out of the law and was on that principle of bondservice. How we love to speak of our Lord Jesus, the true Hebrew bondman, One who served in love, who magnified the law and made it honourable! All that God Himself desired in relation to man was found in His own beloved Son, the Hebrew bondman. Then in John 13, the chapter that opens the door to that tremendous area of spiritual wealth in chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 of that gospel, it is inaugurated by the Bondservant. The Lord in His service of love with the wash-hand basin and the towel indicated that the unfolding of all that divine wealth in these wonderful chapters lay in relation to this bondservice, which He set on. I touch on these things briefly; they could be much amplified.

Then at the beginning of Acts, when the dispensation of Christianity was set on, Peter in his address, quoting from the prophet Joel, speaks about the incoming of the Spirit and about bondmen and bondwomen (see chap 2: 16-18) - quite remarkable, calling attention to the fact that what the Spirit's presence involved would be carried through on the principle of bondmanship. I emphasise for the encouragement of our sisters, bondmen and bondwomen. It brings in the young people in that passage also: it says "your sons and your daughters". It is a very touching matter that in the beginning of this dispensation the principle of bondservice is called attention to as vital for its continuance. We can draw from the Old Testament for an illustration of bondservice in the sisters the young maid in Naaman's house. She took on the service of preaching the glad tidings to Naaman through her mistress, and it brings out how God honours and values that which is not necessarily official.

In these passages read I want first to call attention to the fact that in Romans 1: 1 Paul refers to his bondmanship before he refers to his apostleship - a very interesting thing. It says "bondman of

Jesus Christ", and then "a called apostle". In the great matter of the glad tidings Paul would say that all that I have to say is a service of love on the principle of bondmanship. What a word that is for us, beloved brethren, to esteem the lowly way of serving the Lord, to promote what is of God in the spirit of Christ, in the spirit of bondservice. One servant of the Lord said (I do not quote the exact words) that one who really loved the saints would not make over-much of what was official in his service; he would be marked by the spirit of bondmanship and care for the saints. So in the epistle to the Romans it says: "Paul, bondman of Jesus Christ, a called apostle, separated to God's glad tidings". Are we all bondmen of Jesus Christ? Has the glory of the gospel, the glory of the glad tidings, the glory of the Man anointed, so affected us in our souls that we are committed in love to the service of it. You say, I do not preach, I have not a gift. Of course, an element of gift is desirable in the preaching, but the idea of bondservice related to the gospel involves that our heart, soul and spirit are enthused with the glory of the glad tidings concerning Jesus Christ, that order of Man. I would encourage the brethren to seek the help of the Spirit to have elevated thoughts in regard to the glad tidings. There is a great need for the development of the glad tidings with us, not a Lord's Day matter only by any means, but being a bondman of Jesus Christ in regard to the glad tidings. Again, sisters can enter into this matter of evangelisation, speaking to souls, to neighbours, and the younger brethren, desiring to impart the truth of the glad tidings to them. The Lord would honour such a service these days. It may be, beloved brethren, that the Lord has a word for us in that, not to place everything on the public preaching but to seek to promote the glad tidings in a constant way amongst men. Jesus Christ is the Man anointed, His work completed, His blood shed, raised from the dead and now in the glory, and we are the heralds, bearing testimony to the Man that God has anointed, in the spirit of bondmanship. If our souls were filled with the glory of the gospel there would be an unquestionable devotion marking us which would in itself affect people with the reality of what we commit ourselves to in the fellowship.

In Titus Paul speaks of himself as "bondman of God" first, "and apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's elect". We might have thought he would have said, 'Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ' and then 'bondman of God' but, as in Romans, not so. So the question would arise as to what is a bondman of God and how it differs from a bondman of Jesus Christ. To find an answer to that question we have to consider the whole epistle to Titus. This was at Crete, and what marked Crete was the abandonment of every right standard of human conduct. Beloved brethren, it is incumbent upon us in our households and in our personal lives to be bondman of God, that is to maintain divine standards in a day of public laxity as to morals and as to general conduct, and the general lack of piety.

Being bondmen of God would involve His holiness, something that we do not speak too much about - holiness. Righteousness is rightly stressed, but holiness means that as a bondman of God you maintain divine standards in the presence of the general declension amongst men. Beloved young brethren, it is very, very easy to succumb to the deteriorating influences of things in this world. What in one generation is viewed with apprehension, in the next is accepted as normal, which is a solemn thought.

A bondman of God will see to it that in his personal life, in his household life, in his business life, the divine standards of piety and holiness are maintained as a testimony against the prevailing corruption in the world. An Old Testament illustration of it would be Daniel. He would not pollute himself with the king's meat. He stood a bondman of God there, prepared to maintain the standard that God set in purity and holiness. So I would press that exercise upon the young people, that the corrupting influences of this world are met, not only by precept or commandment but by persons who regard themselves as bondmen of God, committed to the will of God and the testimony.

Now in Colossians 4 we have "Epaphras, who is one of you, the bondman of Christ Jesus", not 'bondman of Jesus Christ', not 'bondman of God' but "bondman of Christ Jesus". Now, what would that be - a bondman of Christ Jesus? A bondman of Christ Jesus is a

person who has the light of a glorified Christ in his heart and the light of His assembly down here, and by prayers, like those of Epaphras, combats earnestly "that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God". We need, beloved brethren, to have these bondmen of Christ Jesus today, the insistence on the heavenly calling. The outlook of the saint is heavenly, and his practice flows from what he is as heavenly, a bondman of Christ Jesus.

The truth of the church is the one that the enemy seeks to destroy. There might even be the tendency to associate with evangelical groups under the plea that they are at least doing something for the good of man, but the heavenly calling is the vital thing in the testimony at the present time, and Epaphras laboured constantly and earnestly in regard to that matter. He did not think only of his local meeting. We do not want to be parochial, beloved brethren. You might say, Well, I carry heavy burdens locally. We all do, we carry heavy burdens in every place, in every city, but we want to be bondmen of Christ Jesus and maintain the truth of the heavenly character of the assembly and think of the testimony as affecting localities universally. Another thing that was said about Epaphras was that he took account of their love in the Spirit (see Col 1: 8). Could I say, beloved brethren that that should be looked into very carefully, love in the Spirit? Love in the Spirit is free from partisan taint, from special friendships and natural influences. Love in the Spirit is a love with which the Holy Spirit can identify Himself, in divine channels working amongst God's people. There is a relation between love in the Spirit and the enjoyment of the heavenly calling by the saints. Love in the Spirit is the avenue by which the bondmen of Christ Jesus in the heavenly calling will operate.

In 2 Timothy 2 we find an allusion to "a bondman of the Lord". The expression "a bondman of the Lord" must of necessity be related to verse 21: "serviceable to the Master", and the note gives 'despot'. There would be a relation between these two thoughts. A bondman of the Lord would be under the Lord in regard to the testimony, and he would feel it incumbent upon him to maintain these four great divine principles - righteousness, faith, love and

peace. A bondman of the Lord as committed to the testimony and under the authority of Christ would maintain these four highways, and in a broken day we have to accustom ourselves to that. Then he says, he "ought not to contend". Somebody may raise the question, Have we not to contend for the truth? Assuredly. It is Jude who says "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints" (v 3). But here the bondman is told not to contend. The allusion is to what Paul said elsewhere: "For the arms of our warfare are not fleshly" - we do not contend - "but powerful according to God to the overthrow of strongholds ... and leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ" (2 Cor 10: 4,5). A bondman of the Lord does not resort to carnal weapons. He has the divine armoury by which he can maintain the testimony, and he is "gentle towards all", which would be an allusion to priestliness, how the priestly touch would be with the bondman of the Lord. Then "apt to teach"; I would call the attention of the brethren to note 'e' on that word 'teach'. Mr Darby says, 'Some take this to mean "teachable", but it seems to be more the spirit of the servant of the Lord'. So a bondman of the Lord must serve with his spirit controlled by the Holy Spirit; "to teach" means that our spirits are under the control of the Holy Spirit. Then "forbearing". I would like to emphasise, beloved brethren, that the solution of matters in Christianity is dependent on suffering. The Lord Jesus solved once and for all the great moral issues on the cross by suffering, and in that there was a setting out of this great thought. I hesitate to call it a principle; it is a principle, but it is the way of the Spirit, that is, for a bondman of the Lord the way of suffering is the way to the resolving of nearly every matter. "Forbearing" means that one has to carry in spirit the suffering way that Jesus went even to the cross to maintain the divine rights, the rights of the throne of God. Then "in meekness setting right those who oppose, if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance to acknowledgement of the truth, and that they may awake up out of the snare of the devil, who are taken by him, for his will". Beloved brethren, what confidence have we in God? Can we count on God to bring about a result for Himself? That is what he brings out here; he says, "if God perhaps". Think of what God can do, think of what He

has done, but there is what God can do and what the bondman of the Lord can do by his spirit and moral power, the divine principles of righteousness, faith, love and peace in this day in which we live.

So I would commend to the brethren the matter of bondservice. It may not get you much public mention, the record of it will not come into the books, shall we say, but it is recorded in heaven because it is after the Spirit of Christ. It is like the Man who trod this suffering way even unto death in order that the divine glory might shine forth, even now, in the assembly. May the thought of bondservice commend itself to all of us, and may we commit ourselves to it in our localities and generally amongst the saints, to labour in the Spirit of Christ for His saints. For His Name's sake. Amen.

GRIMSBY

11 July 1987

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

W.Dickson

Luke 8: 35-39

I often think that, in the after years of this man's life of whom we have been reading, he would look back on this day. No doubt he would have had many memorable days in his life, as we all have, but this man would look back with peculiar pleasure on this day, the account of which is given in this scripture we have read. Now, why would he look back with such pleasure? Well, it was the day on which Jesus came into his life. Oh, beloved hearers, can everyone here look back and think of the day that Jesus came into their lives and the difference that it made? This man would never forget it; he would oft-times go back and say, I was a lost and helpless sinner until the day that Jesus came into my life. Some experiences are good to go over. A great deal is made of birthdays, but it is good to remember our spiritual birthday. This man in effect would be like that, the day when he received the touch which entered into his deep soul consciousness that he was now delivered from the power of Satan and he had found a Saviour. Have you had that experience? You say, I am not sure. Oh, beloved hearers, once you have it you never forget it. It remains as landmark in your spiritual history, the day when the Saviour entered into your life. Oh what a day! Young people, you children, have you known Jesus yet as your Saviour? Have you trusted Jesus? Are you going to trust Him tonight? Are you going to say, The Jesus that you speak of is my Saviour?

So here is this man. "And they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting". He was sitting. We want to dwell a little on these various things, and first of all they found him sitting.

Oh, what a change! Previously he had roamed here and there. He had drunk at every sink of corruption that this world had; he had tried every amusement, every avenue in which the human heart could find pleasure, but he was just as restless after it as ever he was. But the

Lord came into his life, and here he is sitting, a subdued person. Oh, do you know the subduing power of the name of Jesus? Saul of Tarsus did; in Acts 9 you can think of him as sitting at the feet of Jesus. The subduing power of Jesus had entered the life of Saul of Tarsus on that road to Damascus when he thought that there was nothing that could stand against him. There Jesus subdued that man, "And he said, Who art thou, Lord", Acts 9: 5. Have you ever sat at the feet of Jesus? Have you ever been subdued by His power? Have you ever been subdued by His word, His authority, His love, His grace, His mercy? Oh, think of it, the subduing power of Jesus! How Saul of Tarsus felt it on that road that day! He had been an insubject man. He thought that nothing could stand against him, but a few words from that glorious risen Saviour subdued that proud and haughty man, and he became one of the greatest servants the Lord Jesus had ever had in the testimony. This man was sitting.

That is one thing about the gospel, it gives you rest from your labours. We speak feelingly, not in any sense trying to talk down to you, but from how many streams of this world have you drunk? Has Jesus wrought in your heart? Think of it. He was sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Then he was clothed. What were his clothes? Could I suggest that he had the best robe on? That is what the father did in Luke 15, he put the best robe on the son, he clothed him with divine righteousness. Oh, beloved young people, think of what it cost the blessed God, what it cost Jesus to provide you with clothing, with divinely ordered clothing, with a righteousness according to God, not a righteousness according to works but a righteousness according to God. What a change! Once a naked, wandering, wilful sinner, now sitting and clothed in a righteousness that God had provided for him, justified in that the Christ's place on high was his place, that he need not fear the judgment or condemnation because he could look up into the presence of God and say, That blessed Man up there is the standard of my justification.

Then it says that he was sensible. Oh, I trust we all know what that means. It is a reference to the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of

the Holy Spirit is the divine sensibility that God gives you - "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit", Rom 5: 5.

Oh, what a difference that man would know! Have you the gift of the Holy Spirit, that precious gift? Do you ever speak to the Holy Spirit? Do you ever commune with Him? Do you ever tell the Holy Spirit how thankful you are that the Lord Jesus converted you? He was sensible and saw everything differently. He would not envy the people that went after worldly pleasures or think they are having the best of life. He had the power of the Holy Spirit working in his heart. Oh, the gift of the Holy Spirit! How precious that gift is! Make sure, young people, that you value the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank God every day if He opens your lips in thanksgiving for the gift of the Holy Spirit, that precious gift money cannot buy. It is God's gift, His sovereign gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Do not go out into this world in the morning, do not venture over the doorstep, without committing your soul to the care of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power that keeps you from sin, the flesh, the devil. He will keep you in the path of righteousness for the sake of Jesus.

Then it says he was "at the feet of Jesus". That is beautiful: "at the feet of Jesus". What would he experience at the feet of Jesus? Well, according to Luke 10, when Mary sat at the feet of Jesus she heard His word. What blessed thoughts these are, to hear the word of Jesus, to sit at His feet every day and find sweet communion with Him, to find your heart revived and touched by that matchless grace of His, to hear Him tell you fresh of His work, of His sacrifice, how He died on Calvary's tree and shed His precious blood. Oh, have you ever sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to Him? Tell me the story of that precious love of His! What sweet thoughts these are, to go over and over them again at the feet of Jesus, to hear Him, listen to His voice appealing to you about the love hat He showed on Calvary's tree when He died for you as a sinner when you had no hope and were without God in the world. When did you last sit at the feet of Jesus and say, Lord, speak to me?

"O tell us often of Thy love,
Of all Thy grief and pain"

- that is what the hymn says (No.172). Sitting at the feet of Jesus, what a change for this man! He would think of the time when he was amongst the tombs. That is what people in this world are doing today, they are spending their life in the tombs in moral death. The stench of moral death is in this world at the present time, and this man spent his time there before he was converted, but now he was sitting at the feet of Jesus. The words of life and joy were coming from the lips of the Saviour, making him thankful for the mercy that had thus reached him. Young people, read your Bible. Read the Gospels, trace the life of Jesus, trace His pathway up to the cross, that love that led Him to die, then see Him on the other side of death going up to the glory. Sit at the feet of Jesus, read the Scriptures and feed your soul with the glory of that blessed Man.

Then the inhabitants asked the Lord to depart. Is that not heartrending, that the very Saviour, the One who had acted in such grace, they asked to depart? You say, Well, I am quite sure if Jesus was to come publicly to this world tonight as He did as a Babe before, His treatment would be quite different. Do you think so? The world would still reject Him, would still say, Away with Him, we will not have this Man to reign over us. They would say, We do not want Jesus. When the church has gone, young people, a man will arise and they will not say to him, Go away. When the antichrist comes to this world they will not say to him, Go away. In strong delusion they will believe a lie when that man comes, but the Lord Jesus is proceeding still in the appeal of divine grace to men.

And so this man "out of whom the demons had gone besought him that he might be with him". You can understand that. Do you say, I like the gospel that assures me of my eternal safety and until that time comes allows me to do as I wish. That man was not like that. He says, I want to be with you, Lord. That must have been something to the Lord's heart. Would you like to keep the Lord company, to have Him as the one blessed object of your heart whose company means everything to you, greater than anything here? The heart that has been touched by divine mercy and divine grace desires no greater privilege than to have the company of

Jesus; day by day to have the company of Jesus, to walk with Him, to commune with Him, to pray to Him, to love Him, to remember Him. Oh, that is good, he wanted to be with Jesus, and then the Lord sent him away and said, "Return to thine house". That is a reminder to us of the practical character of the gospel, that it is in our houses that we display the effect of the gospel. In other words, you are a better husband or wife or daughter or son, you are a better child, after receiving the grace of God, than what you were before. His father and mother when he came in would say, Is this the boy that we had? Is this the young lad? What a change! He would say, I will tell you about the change, I will tell you how it came about, the day that Jesus came into my heart. Ah, he would never tire of telling his father and mother of the day on which Jesus came into his heart. He would go up to his bedroom and he would pray. If his father and mother tiptoed upstairs and listened at the door they would say, What is he doing? He is not singing the songs of the world. No, he is praying, he is praying to God. He would sing too. A believer sings, sings with joy in his heart, sings the songs of Zion. A Christian should be happy. Many of us are not good advertisements for Christianity. There is not enough joy with us. A Christian is a joyful person, and this young man would be such. Jesus says, "Return to thine house and relate how great things God has done for thee". He would never run out of material in telling how great things God had done for him. There are many here, older men and older women, younger ones too, and they can tell you many times over about the great things that God has done. Wonderful grace! As you look back in your history and see how God in His infinite grace preserved you from a step that would have landed you in deep sorrow you can say, It was just the grace of God, one of the great things God did, He preserved me. This man would say, The forgiveness of my sins, justification, peace with God, the gift of the Spirit, eternal life, the light of the assembly, the coming day of glory, the Lord's coming - great things! This man's heart would be full of these blessings.

"And he went away through the whole city, publishing how great things Jesus had done for him". Now, that word 'publishing',

linking with the scripture, "great the host of the publishers" (Ps 68: 11), means that he was an evangelist. The best evangelists are persons who can speak from experience of the grace of God. Every person he met, if he had the opportunity he would tell them about the Saviour. Some years ago a well known evangelist was having a meeting on a Saturday night in the place where we lived and he was going home in the train. The carriage was crowded with people going home, so he started to preach the gospel in the railway carriage. One by one the voices got quieter and quieter until there was dead silence, and one voice said, That is a fine message. Another voice said, I do not think so, he does not know the time nor the place. Our brother said, I will not accept that, "Behold, now is the wellaccepted time; behold, now the day of salvation", 2 Cor 6: 2. When it comes to a question of your soul's eternal welfare you cannot bring in the question of time or place. Accept and finalise your link with Jesus tonight and publish what He has done for you.

That is what God has in mind. He has in mind great things for you, not just to deliver you from the wrath to come but to give you the joy of the possession by the Spirit of a link with Christ, a living, personal link with Christ. May you prove it for His Name's sake. Amen.

GRIMSBY

12 July 1987

BELIEVING CHILDREN

In the very early years of Christianity there were doubtless many young believers on the Lord Jesus. We read, for instance of Rhoda, a "maid" who recognised the voice of Peter. She maintained that which she believed - a sure way of growing in the truth. Peter had been made a shepherd by his Master and his first task was to "Feed my lambs". Rhoda knew the voice of the one who led her and many another into suitable, spiritual pastures. She was thus used to rally all the rest of those representing the "flock of God" and who were at the prayer-meeting.

We read also of "believing children" on an island called Crete where there were widespread habits of not telling the truth and of other evil things. It would be interesting to know more about the Christian witness in this place where Paul had left Titus, "mine own child according to the faith common to us". In his letter to him Paul wrote of the grace of God which had brought salvation available to all humanity in the Person of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. It would have attracted the hearts of the children to hear Titus speak about Jesus and His work of atonement for sins. They would also learn that He is Lord to us and, though truly man is "God blessed for ever". Remembering His lordship would be salvation to them and indeed to all of us from the way and words of evil such as there were in Crete. It would remind them too that the Lord looked to them to remember Him in the breaking of bread.

It is assumed that the boy Eutychus at Troas was a believer and desired to break bread with the assembled company gathered there on the first day of the week and including Paul. His name means 'fortunate'. He may have been inattentive at the meeting or

more likely had given up a good seat for a hazardous one and, in the warmth of many lights and after a long day's activity, he went to sleep. Then in the mysterious ways of God, that which would be otherwise called an accident in the outside darkness, led to Eutychus receiving a lovegiven and life-giving embrace by the great apostle.

This shows us that, however young and well-meaning we may be, we need the transforming and affectionate touch of Paul's ministry. Do you read his epistles?

J.C.Evershed