

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 187

October 1988

Contents

PROVING AS THE MEANS OF VITALITY

SONS OF OIL

CROWNED CHILDREN

PROVING AS THE MEANS OF VITALITY

1 Peter 1: 3-9; Romans 12: 1,2; Psalm 139: 23,24

J.N.G. The brethren will have noticed that the idea of proving something comes into these three scriptures. It occurred to me that we might pursue that together profitably. The vitality of Christianity does not lie exactly in knowledge of the Scriptures, although that is needed, nor the knowledge of the ministry, although that also is needed, but it lies in our knowledge of God, and I think that God loves to test us and allow circumstances and other things to come in to prove us, to bring out His own work, because there is nothing that God loves to see more than His own work coming to light in the souls of His people.

This passage in Peter refers to the proving of our faith - "the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes". An illustration of that would be what is said of Abraham; that "God tried Abraham" (Gen 22: 1); He tried him as He tries us all. One thing to be observed, I think, is that the greatest test to Abraham's faith came towards the close of his life. We may think that things get easier as we grow older, but I do not think that is the divine way. I think we would like to answer to God's testings like Abraham did.

R.S.R. Does 'proving' suggest personal experience?

J.N.G. I think it does: having to do with God brings out our dependence on God. It is the proving of our faith here: that is how faith answers to testing. It did in Abraham's case it answered by way of obedience, did it not? A very simple way of our faith being proved is by our obedience.

R.S.R. In John 6 Peter says, "and we have believed and known that thou art the holy one of God" (v 69).

J.N.G. Peter had learned by way of experience to say that. It was a priestly utterance something that he had learned in his own soul - not

exactly by way of light or learned from others - but he had learned by having to do with the Lord Himself.

J.R. In Genesis it says that "God tried Abraham". It says here, "put to grief by various trials, that the proving of your faith...", and so on.

It is the circumstances through which we pass that are meant to prove our faith.

J.N.G. Would you not think that it would be a grief to Abraham having to offer up Isaac? It was the biggest, greatest, trial of faith that could have been given to him, to offer up his only son whom he loved.

J.R. And yet he "rose early in the morning".

J.N.G. Well, that is how he answered to it. It brings out, in type of course, the wonderful love between the Father and the Son. What Abraham's obedience must have meant to God!

W.D. Faith is very important in connection with the vitality of Christianity. We are tested hourly as to our faith, not our initial faith in accepting the gospel, but faith for the pathway too. Do you think so?

J.N.G. Yes, I think that; so that the testing of our faith is something that continues from the very time we accept the gospel till the end of our sojourn here. We sometimes think that things will get a bit easier. I do not think they will, but our knowledge of God should increase through these things and perhaps there should be a more ready answer to the testings God allows us to go through. What do you say?

W.D. I am thinking of what you are saying about Abraham. Many things are said about him in the Scriptures but he is the father of those that have faith - that is one thing that marks him. An outstanding characteristic of Abraham was his faith.

J.N.G. He obeyed: that was characteristic of him too. That is faith's answer - obedience; and that is what we get at the beginning and the end of Romans, "obedience of faith".

R.S.R. We have the expression "believing Abraham" (Gal 3: 9) which is a very fine one, showing that it was characteristic of him all his way through. Are we not tested in our faith as to our prayers?

J.N.G. Do you find that?

R.S.R. I certainly do. Do you?

J.N.G. Yes, I do. But then perhaps we do not realise as we might what it means to God to see the answer on our side to the testings that He does allow. He tests us sometimes to extremities. You think of all the sufferings that the Lord in His wisdom has allowed amongst us. Then you think of those we once walked with; they are being tested. God has not given them up. And you think of those we have never walked with; you think of our brethren around us that we have never had the privilege of walking with. I think a good many of them are being sorely tested by the apostasy that is coming in in Christendom, and God sees something there, I think, that is an answer to their faith. Do you agree with that?

R.S.R. I do. I think sometimes that there must be many persons who are sighing and crying at the present moment, and God puts a mark upon them.

J.M. Do we prove God by being obedient?

J.N.G. I think that is just the truth, we prove God by being obedient. What Abraham must have meant to God! It was not just one act when God told him this. He had to go a journey, and throughout all that journey with Isaac he was being thoroughly tested as to whether he would go the whole way; and I think that is one of the greatest ways in which God is testing us today, as to whether we will go the whole way in the testimony.

J.M. The Lord Jesus went all the way in obedience.

J.N.G. He did. It speaks of Him in connection with faith: "the leader and completer of faith, Heb 12: 2. That should be an encouragement to us should it not?

E.J. 'In the great faith chapter of Hebrews it says as to Abraham, "By faith Abraham, when tried, offered up Isaac", chap 11: 17. I think

we need to be tried; it brings out backbone in people, does it not?

J.N.G. I think it does. Of course we do not like it. I do not think any of us likes being tested, particularly on a matter of faith; not only in our individual pathways is that so, but testings of faith extend throughout every area in which we move in Christianity, faith even enters to the highest notes of the service of God.

W.G. God says in regard to Abraham, "For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice, in order that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham what he hath spoken of him" Gen 18: 19. I wondered if that brought out God's appreciation of what was seen in Abraham.

J.N.G. He was called "Friend of God", Jas 2: 23. I think we need to appreciate a little more how God looks down on the testings of our faith and takes pleasure in the answer to them in the simple way of obedience.

J.D.G. In the scripture you have brought before us in Peter, mercy seems to precede what you are speaking about. It says, "according to his great mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope". Peter never forgot the mercy that had been shown to him.

J.N.G. I think mercy is a basic thing in our souls. I like the way that Peter starts off this section on a note of worship where he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". I think if our souls are occupied with Christ, it keeps us happy whatever the testings are. You say something more.

J.D.G. I thought that mercy is appreciated; then the "living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead" - that is anticipative of the completion of Abraham's exercises - and then, "to an incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance". Then I wondered what you might say about "who are kept guarded by the power of God through faith for salvation". Faith is operative there in view of salvation and God is guarding us by it.

J.N.G. In view of the end, "the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls".

J.D.G. Before that, in verse 5: "who are kept guarded by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time". God's power is operative, guarding us through faith.

J.N.G. Does not that expression - "through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" - go right through to the salvation of our bodies? But for the moment it is "the salvation of your souls" as verse 9 says. In between is this pathway of faith and the testings of faith. Well, young and old, we are being tested.

R.S.R. I have sometimes wondered about this expression "if needed" - "Wherein ye exult, for a little while at present, if needed, put to grief by various trials, that the proving of your faith ...". What do you say?

J.N.G. Well, I often feel that the trials that come upon me are certainly needed. Is that what you find?

R.S.R. Yes. Would it connect with the vitality you are speaking of, bringing out that feature?

J.N.G. It brings out our links with God. These things are experimental; it is not just our knowledge of the truth, our knowledge of the ministry, but it involves our vital links with God.

J.R. Is that not what faith is? It is not anything in ourselves; it is in a Person or in the blood. It is in something outside ourselves, and that becomes an anchor.

J.N.G. That is the way we start: "repentance towards God, and faith" in the living Person, "towards our Lord Jesus Christ", Acts 20: 21. So it involves our links with the Lord every day.

J.R. That is just what I was thinking linking it, as you did at the beginning, with our knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus. Does not the Spirit help us according to our faith?

J.N.G. He does, and that is our link with the Lord, is it not? Our link with the Lord in heaven is the Spirit down here, and that is really the

vitality of Christianity.

W.D. That expression "if needed": the Lord saw that it was needed with Peter: "but I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not", Luke 22: 32. The Lord put him through these trials that he went through, and he writes this epistle.

J.N.G. Is it not a great comfort that in that passage the Lord allowed Peter to go through a very severe trial, but He says, "I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not"; so we are in good hands, are we not?

R .S-e. The apostle says, "but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me", Gal 2: 20.

J.N.G. He lived by faith, did he not?

R.S-e. Can you help us as to "the faith of the Son of God"?

J.N.G. Well, it is another Man and another world. It is a wonderful thing that we have a link with a Man in another world who is going to establish something, and nothing will fail of what He establishes for God.

J.G.Jr. I was wondering if you would say a little more about the reference to Peter because his faith seemed to fail for a little while.

J.N.G. Well, he was quickly recovered, and we are not much different, are we? How often we give up. Maybe we go a certain distance and then our faith begins to fail, but the Lord would see us through, but He will see us through on our side on the line obedience. I think Christianity is made very simple for us. You say, How does faith operate? I think it operates on our side just by obedience.

J.R. Does not the Lord pray regarding Peter that his faith would not fail, not exactly that he would not fail but that his faith would not fail.

He would come through to repentance; his faith would hold and bring him through, do you think?

J.N.G. That helps.

B.S. Peter's courage failed, but his faith did not. Mr Darby says, (in hymn 244), 'our faith and courage tried'. We need to distinguish, do we not?

J.N.G. Well, you distinguish for us.

B.S. Peter never ceased to believe, but he was not brave enough to act on what he believed and do we not need help in that?

J.N.G. We can all say that our courage has sometimes failed us. We are not brave enough to stand. What happened over the years is that some of us should have stood for things and we did not because we did not have the faith, but really, if you go to the root of that we were not obedient to what we did know.

W.D. If I can speak personally, one of the greatest tests to my faith at the present time is that the truth of the assembly can be worked out and known in the presence of the breakdown which has come in.

J.N.G. Well, the truth stands, does it not? If there is any failure it is on our side, but the truth is workable in spite of all the difficulties and breakdown and scattering; the truth is still workable because of the presence of the Spirit of God.

D.L.S. There was a time when the Lord had to say to Peter and the disciples: "O ye of little faith, Luke 12: 28. Is faith something with us which is meant to increase as we prove in obedience what the Lord would bring in?

J.N.G. Did they not say to the Lord "Give more faith to us", Luke 17: 5?

D.L.S. Faith would be linked with confidence, would it not?

J.D.G. Yes it would, but also, do you not think, that no believer can ever say he does not have faith for the pathway. There is no test that can ever arise for which we can say we do not have faith. "God has dealt to each a measure of faith" (Rom 12: 3), and that measure of faith is sufficient to carry us through everything that God allows, do you think?

D.L.S. "Various trials" are really the means that God uses that we might learn to have confidence and go on in the path, are they not?

J.N.G. Exactly, and this epistle is written to "the sojourners of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" in circumstances where things were very difficult. They were scattered throughout all these countries and these Jewish believers would be wondering how they were going to get through, and so Peter writes this to strengthen their faith.

J.R. He goes on to say "Jesus Christ: whom, having not seen, ye love". "Having not seen" - that is, it is a faith time - "ye love." Faith leads to attachment and affection, does it not? "On whom though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory".

J.N.G. Can we get through to that? I am not sure that I know too much about it but I should like to.

J.R. It comes in loving, does it not? "Whom, having not seen, ye love". Our faith and our courage fail if we do not have the Person before us and think of ourselves, do you think?

J.N.G. What did Peter say? "Lord, to whom shall we go?", John 6: 68.

J.M. When Peter was walking on the sea he began to look at the winds and he began to sink, and the Lord says to him, "why didst thou doubt?" (Matt 14: 31) and He caught hold of him.

J.N.G. He caught hold of him - what an experience that would be for Peter, personal experience with the Lord! I think that is what is in mind tonight that we should have personal experiences with the Lord Jesus and with the Spirit and with the Father. That to me is the vitality of Christianity.

Now the scripture in Romans is not the proving of our faith but proving the will of God; that is something not just to be known but is to be proved.

J.M. At the end of the section read in Peter it seems to result in praise. It is a good thing when we go through trials that there is

something in it for divine Persons.

J.N.G. That is fine. I am sure that is the result intended, that we should not only find relief on our side as to what is needed, and sustaining in difficulties and trials but, as you say, something that is a yield for God from ourselves.

R.S-n. When the apostles said to the Lord, "Give more faith to us" (Luke 17: 5), is faith working through love? We have it mentioned in Galatians: "faith working through love", chap 5: 6.

J.N.G. That reference in Luke is in connection with forgiving, is it not? I think we could well read those verses: "And if he should sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times should return to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said to the Lord Give more faith to us". That is what tests us, the Spirit of forgiveness in relation to one another.

R.S.R. Does the Lord not indicate in that passage that we use the faith we have? We do not need any more.

J.N.G. It is a lesson to be learned, that we cannot excuse ourselves. The Lord has given us all that is needed. If we just trust Him and obey, I think we will prove the faith that is spoken of in Peter.

E.J. The enemy is going about as a roaring lion, Peter says, "Whom resist, stedfast in faith", 1 Pet 5: 9. I think we need that at the present moment - steadfastness. .

J.N.G. I agree. We are so inclined to give up in the face of difficulties, whether they be difficulties in our own circumstances or difficulties that seem to arise in the course of the testimony or in the world, but we need to be steadfast in our faith in God.

J.R. It says in this chapter in Romans, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God". What would you say about "the renewing of your mind"?

J.N.G. Does it not mean that at this point the believer is wholly secured for God? His heart has been filled with divine love - the love

of God shed abroad in our hearts - and then the mind of the believer is secured in Romans 6, 7 and 8, and now the body of the believer is secured, so that the whole man is secured for the will of God. But that has to be proved, and that is a very practical matter. I was thinking of Paul in this connection. Paul had to prove what the will of God was. He thought he would go in one direction in connection with the testimony, but he was not allowed to go. It must have raised questions with him. What do you say?

J.R. It is as we commit ourselves to the will of God that we prove how good and acceptable and perfect it is.

J.N.G. We do not always like it; we think it is not as good as what we would like, but we Just accept it. We find that it is good, then it becomes acceptable, and as we find it acceptable, we find it is perfect.

R.S-e. Is this first verse an answer to what we have in He who gave Himself "an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour", Eph 5: 2?

J.N.G. I think it is. That was seen in the Lord Jesus in perfection; He delighted in the will of God. He knew what the will of God involved for Him. We do not always know what the will of God is, and sometimes we are a little bit rebellious about it.

E.J. The footnote says, 'to your proving'. It seems to be a present matter; it is always there, is it not?

J.N.G. That is what these scriptures would suggest. It is not a finished matter at any time. It is a current matter, and that is our life. That is the vitality of Christianity that I referred to. It is not an historical thing.

B.S. Would you please say a word about, "And be not conformed to this world".

J.N.G. That is always a very present danger with us, being conformed to the world and its fashions and its ways in doing things, but it says, "And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed".

B.S. Our bodies cannot be "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" if there is any degree of conformity with this world, can they?

J.N.G. So he comes back to the mind, does he not! "And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind". If our minds are set in the right direction, then we will begin to prove what the will of God really means. It is the best thing out for us. We often think the other way round; particularly when we are young; it is a bit restrictive, and we would like to go another way, and sometimes we try the other way and find it does not work, and then we come back to it that it must be good. If we accept that the will of God is good, then we will soon find it acceptable, and then we will prove it is perfect.

R.S.R. I remember looking up this word "good". It is not comparative - we were taught at school, good, better, best; it is not that - it means that it always operates in our favour.

J.N.G. That helps.

R.S-e. I take it that this "renewing of your mind" is a daily matter.

J.N.G. That is so. These are not historical matters, they are operating all the time, and the proving of His will results in yielding something for God, presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, and so on. This works out, of course, in our relations with one another finally - what we think of one another; respect for one another and affection for one another are all connected with the will of God.

W.G. Is the expression "by the compassions of God" important to understand? Paul had some sense of how great the compassions of God were.

J.N.G. Yes, and how far do our compassions extend? They begin with one another, but in the gospel the compassions of God find an expression towards all men, do they not?

W.G. I am sure that is right, and I feel how little I understand the compassions of God, how wonderful they are; but we would want to learn more of them.

J.N.G. God has all men in mind. There is never anything we enjoy, whether individually or collectively, that is not the mind of God for all men, and with the world in its present state the violence and corruption of the world God is thinking all the time in terms of the very best for every man. That is how I understand the truth.

J.M. It is by the compassions of God that we have to present our bodies. You feel that if you do not move in that way (I am thinking of what it says in Corinthians, "if I deliver up my body ... but have not love", 1 Cor 13: 3, you are nothing).

J.N.G. Just so. Think of the compassions of God, how they have come out towards us! God is thinking in terms of blessing for us all the time, is He not? In all that has happened amongst the brethren, the sufferings and accidents and husbands and wives torn apart, children and parents, we know that God is thinking of us in terms of compassion, but can we make ourselves available, or are we just thinking of ourselves all the time? I think that is a test to me. I think of my own circumstances and how I am suffering (if I am suffering).

A.B. Would the renewed mind bring a different outlook, a different way of thinking? You are speaking of consideration and care for others, but all that would come in this renewed mind that thinks differently from the world, does it not?

J.N.G. Well, does it bring in the lowly mind that was in Christ Jesus instead of (as it says a bit later) "high thoughts", "to every one that is among you, not to have high thoughts above what he should think".

J.R. "And be not conformed to this world" has in mind part in another order of things, the "one body in Christ" (v 5), an organism down here.

J.N.G. That is what is in mind. I am glad you refer to that because that is what this epistle is leading up to and it is teaching in relation to one with another; and Paul, at the end of this epistle in connection with the gospel, cannot help referring to the mystery.

J.R. So there is a link between presenting our bodies and having part in the "one body in Christ", is there not?

J.N.G. That is an entirely different state to anything that we can have in the world. Men join all sorts of organisations and bodies in this world, but there is nothing to compare with what is in Christ, "one body in Christ".

R.S-n. Earlier in Romans we get how we yield our members as instruments of righteousness (see chap 6: 13). I was thinking of the jailor, how he laid on the stripes, but it says, "And having brought them into his house he laid the table for them", Acts 16: 34. His members were becoming instruments of righteousness, were they not?

J.N.G. They surely were, and I suppose, having laid the stripes on Paul, the converted jailor would show the compassions of God when he laid the table, would he not? All this comes out in the gospel very simply, I think.

B.S. The transforming works out from what is inward does it not? It is not just something put on or put off, but as most of us know, it is the word used for the way that a caterpillar turns into a butterfly; it is an inward development that eventually comes to light and changes the whole outward appearance even.

J.N.G. That is the way the truth works, is it not? As we were saying, it is not a knowledge of the Scriptures - we have that and we need it, and a knowledge of the ministry - but how we work ministry out with God and our circumstances that God allows with each of us. That is Romans; in the very place where we have misrepresented God, now through the gospel we have been secured and by the Spirit we are enabled to represent God in the very place where we have failed. That is God's victory at the present time.

E.J. I was thinking of a man like Jeremiah in Lamentations under the greatest pressure, "because" he says, "his compassions fail not" chap 3: 22. It was a remarkable thing to say in view of what he was passing through, was it not?

J.N.G. Well, we prove the compassions of God. Of course, we prove them through one another too, do we not? That is what this line of things leads up to. The truth of the body is not worked out in

Romans (it is worked out in other epistles) but a living organism that we have part in has been referred to.

R.T. What is says in Luke 10 is that He was "moved with compassion" (v 33). It operates, does it not?

J.N.G. Yes, just so. As you say, it is operating; He went and did something. So if you just feel compassion for a brother or a sister, can you put in a word that will encourage their hearts? Can you send them a letter if they are ten thousand miles away? You do not know what the result of that will be. Well, the result of it will be just what the result would be if you yourself received a letter from ten thousand miles away if you were in trouble.

R.S.R. In Psalm 139 David speaks historically first of all, and then he invites the searching. What do you say about that?

J.N.G. My concern would be whether we are up to that. Have we the faith in God that would say to God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts"?

W.D. The note to that word 'thoughts' is quite illuminating, is it not? It says, 'anxious (or conflicting) thoughts', which is rather expressive of our own exercises sometimes in the pressures that come upon you.

Anxious or conflicting thoughts - perhaps we would hide them from our brethren, or hide them from one another, but God would search us, and He would perhaps give us to understand regarding these things, would you say?

J.N.G. He will search us, but do we know Him enough to ask Him to search us?

J.R. On Saturday we had the inwards, did we not? This would affect our inwards, do you think? They are exposed to God in any case, but to invite them to be exposed to ourselves would be something intimate, would it?

J.N.G. I think that; that would be the test. What encourages me in regard to this is that it is a psalm of David. You think of what David went through and his sin and what he did, but how he met it and repented of his sin in the presence of God; and here he says,

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts; And see if there be any grievous way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting". I think, or I am coming to think, that often we do not go the whole way in our thoughts and our ways. We ask God to do something for us, but do we have the courage, have we the faith to say to God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; prove me, and know my thoughts; And see ..." Have we the courage to do that, open our hearts completely to God? Maybe we will find He will lead us in the way everlasting.

J.R. It is very like the word of God which is "sharper than any two-edged sword", penetrating, and discerning "the thoughts and intents of the heart", Heb 4: 12.

J.N.G. That is a very good reference. Then immediately following that there is a reference to the priesthood of Christ, and if we are prepared for the searching we will prove what the priesthood of Christ really means.

J.R. This would be what we call self-judgment, only in depth, would it not? It is not by any means superficial.

J.N.G. I do not know what you think but I do think in my own exercises that the test is as to whether I go all the way. I will go halfway, yes; I will meet things as far as I can but will I go all the way? Do I know God? Do I know my God sufficiently to ask Him to search me?

R.S.R. In 1 Corinthians 11 it says, "But let a man prove himself, and thus eat" (v 28). That is what we do, and we do it, I take it, constantly, but this is God proving us. We would get a right estimate if God proves us, would we not?

J.N.G. It is not what you are in the presence of your brethren but what you are in the presence of God, and there are no secrets there; you cannot hide anything from God, can you? You can hide things from one another but you cannot hide from God.

J.M. Paul says, "he that examines me is the Lord", 1 Cor 4: 4.

J.N.G. Yes, He does. Well, just keep in our mind who He is that is examining us.

W.D. Do you think what David says earlier in the Psalm had helped him in this matter, from verse 14 onward and then on to verse 17? "But how precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand. When I awake, I am still with thee", as if that personal link in a vital sense with God enabled him to stand the searching inwardly.

J.N.G. Really I suppose on our side it is an assurance of the new covenant and God's love toward us, that we know God in that way, that His heart is entirely toward us that we would invite Him to search us. There is nothing that God has in His heart against us. It tests us as to our knowledge of God, and that to me is the vitality of Christianity.

R.S-n. Even from the very outset of this chapter, "Jehovah, thou hast searched me, and known me", it seems a very deep matter with him. He speaks three times in this chapter about searching.

J.N.G. Well, it is evident that the searchings he had been through with God did not discourage him and only made him want to know God better.

EDINBURGH

2 September 1987

Key to initials

(All local unless otherwise stated)

A.Brown, Grangemouth; W.Dickson; J.N.Grace, Melbourne;
J.D.Gray; J.Gray, Jr; W.Grosse; E.Judd; J.Marshall; J.Renton;
R.S.Renton; R.Stenhouse; B.Surtees, Felixstowe; D.L.Stewart;
R.Swan; R.Trotter

SONS OF OIL

A.C.Craig

Zechariah 4: 1-3, 11-14; 2 Kings 4: 1 -7; Leviticus 24: 1; Matthew 25: 6-9

These scriptures, as you would have noticed, refer to oil. I want to make a few suggestions about how to become sons of oil. It is a wonderful commodity, something vital for the filling out of Christianity; you could not do without it sons of oil. It is a description by the Spirit of these two olive trees. They are olive trees, but the comment of the Spirit is that they are sons of oil. It is as if they have qualified for and are entitled to that designation. There is nothing more desirable for all of us, especially maybe for the younger people. Zechariah is a young man and he is very interested, as you would find out in these chapters. It is a great matter to have some potential, and to be resourceful, for that is necessary too.

In the Scriptures you get sons of the kingdom too; a son of the kingdom is over against the pretension and the lawlessness that obtains all around in the world and in Christendom too. It is a great feature to be a son of the kingdom - that is Matthew. Then too a son of peace - these are wonderful things - sons of peace; and then too sons of light, Luke and John, ye are sons of light. Paul too refers to the saints as being sons of light and sons of the day. But 'sons of oil' is very appealing, that you are there and you have a supply for the light. It is a very interesting subject.

As I read from Leviticus, Moses was commanded that pure beaten olive oil should be brought for the light, to light the lamp continually. There has to be no cessation of the light, so there is an obligation upon us to have oil. It is a very vital matter, and I want to show how it is obtained and how we can trust it and so value it. I would encourage every one of us to aim at something like this and to qualify for the degree, so to speak, qualify for the designation. If you have not the oil you cannot claim to be sons of oil. It is very

necessary to have it in view of having part vitally in the testimony and service of God.

So Zechariah is a young man, young men and young women are of great interest to heaven - to the world too, Oh, yes, young people are of great interest to the world, but then God would enlist your interest, and these meetings are for that purpose. God has great things in His mind. In chapter 2 the angel says to another angel, Run, speak to this young man and tell him what God was going to do with Jerusalem. You think of the interest of heaven in the young people that they might know things, that they might know God's mind and have desires to fit into God's system. So this man Zechariah is a young man; there is an older prophet Haggai but Zechariah was young. In this chapter he has been asleep but he is awakened as a man that is awakened out of his sleep. God can do that. God can wake us up; He uses many things to waken us up.

The disciples fell asleep on the mount; the greatest things were taking place on the mount of transfiguration and the disciples fell asleep. And there are great things taking place, dear young people, the greatest things are taking place and we want to be awakened up.

It says, "having fully awoke up they saw his glory, and the two men who stood with him", Luke 9: 32. I think for us it implies that the Spirit has been communicated. That is the idea, being fully awoke up they saw His glory. Once the Spirit has been communicated there is no excuse for being asleep. Now what do you think about these things? What do you think about the Spirit here as the great supply that you might have oil? It is a tradable commodity, it can be used; it is not like water in that sense, it is oil and it is of value. Men know that; this country knows that, our country knows that oil is of tradable value, and so in Christianity. I tell you, dear brethren, that in Christendom the greatest slight is on the Spirit. For two thousand years He has been slighted; He is still here and He is still here with His supply. He is ready to meet any desire and to meet any emergency, the blessed Spirit is here to do that.

You remember the parable of the steward who was accused by his master of wasting his goods (see Luke 16). He was called into

the office and his master said to him, I hear your books are not square; give an account of your stewardship. So the steward saw that he was in a great difficulty. He says, I cannot dig and I am ashamed to beg. Dear young people, if you are not prepared for these two things you will not make much progress; you have to be ready to dig, ready to delve into the Scriptures. He said, I cannot dig. Fancy a man saying he cannot dig! Did you ever dig into the Scriptures, dig into the ministry? If you want to become a son of oil you have to get busy, you cannot lose any time; you have to dig.

You might leave primary and go to high school, you might go to the university; these things do not help you one bit to become a son of oil. You have to learn to read and write, granted, but in connection with the son of oil it is a question of your relation to God and your relation to the Spirit. You are linked with the Spirit as I hope to show. So this man could not dig and he could not beg. If you cannot beg you will be in poverty. You have to beg, beg the Father, pray to the Father, pray to the Lord, these are the means to get oil. But this man saw he was in difficulty so he calls in the first debtor of his master and said, How much do you owe? Oh, he said; I owe a hundred baths of oil. And he said, Take your writing and sit down quickly, take your cheque book and write fifty. Do it quickly, he said. Then he called in the next man, How much do you owe? He said, A hundred cors of wheat, and he said, You write eighty. Notice that the greatest discount was on the oil; the greatest slight is on the Spirit.

They go along with the truth of Jesus so far but when they come to the Spirit the biggest discount is on that, the greatest slight is on the Spirit. We all can come into the gain of the presence of the Spirit; the way to it, dear young people, is to dig and to beg. Do not be ashamed to dig, do not be ashamed to beg. You do not need to be ashamed, the whole thing is available for you; whatsoever you ask you will receive. I only mention that to show how the Spirit is slighted and all the time He is available that there might be a supply with us, the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ - that is it really. The epistle to the Philippians gives you the great idea of oil, not so much water but more the oil that is available in view of the testimony coming out here like Christ.

So this young man Zechariah is very, very interested. There is a lot in the chapter but he is very interested in these two olive trees.

He is asked what he sees and he said, "I see, and behold, a lamp-stand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon seven lamps and seven pipes to the lamps". He saw all that. And he says, "and two olivetrees beside it, one on the right of the bowl, and the other on the left of it". Now, after being told certain things about the headstone being put in its place and the hands of Zerubbabel finishing the house, he comes back to this matter where I read in verse 11, and asks the question again, "What are these two olive-trees on the right of the lamp-stand and on its left? " He is very interested in that, he is not going to give up. "And I answered the second time and said unto him, What are the two olive-branches which are beside the two golden tubes ... ?" He is very interested in these two olive-trees. What are you interested in? Come now, let us be honest with one another and ourselves. Be honest with yourself, be honest with your own history, be honest with your present state, what are you interested in? Here is a young man interested in these two olive-trees and they are standing beside the lamp-stand, they are standing beside the golden tubes. Where do you stand? How do you stand? This is a very wonderful sight; I do not mean to go into it, but there are seven lamps and seven pipes to each lamp, that is forty-nine - that is a local meeting. There is a place for you in the local meeting, a place to function. If you are a son of oil you can be a supplier of the oil for the light. There are seven lamps and seven pipes to each. Now this is very important and I am sure you can see that Zechariah, a young man, would be ready to fill out his part in this matter of being a son of oil.

Now as I said, it is not only a great privilege but there is obligation that the oil has to be brought: "Command ... that they bring ... pure beaten olive oil for the light". You have come into blessing, you have come into salvation, you have blessing on the basis of the death of Jesus; there is a certain obligation, having received the Spirit, that we bring the oil for the light, pure beaten olive oil. I will speak about that, the kind of oil it is, but the obligation is on us that

that might be brought. And you can be sure that Zechariah would not be slow in bringing forward his supply, and we all can contribute to that. What a privilege! What a favour to have our part in God's system of things where the testimony is being maintained, life is being maintained. We should be concerned that the light may not go out. And he said, "knowest thou not what these are? And I said, No, my lord. And he said, These are the two sons of oil, that stand before the Lord of the whole earth". Think of that, think of heaven regarding you and me as being sons of oil! It is not only belonging to the sons but it belongs to the sisters as well, we all can be sons of oil, with some supply that we have gained through our contacts with the Spirit and making way for the Spirit - that is the idea. I would commend this to us that the opportunity is upon us and it is ours that we might be ready with our supply, with potential substance, spiritual substance that can be contributed in view of something in the way of the light shining.

Now I read in Kings about these two young men. The sons of this widow become sons of oil and I want to add something as to how it comes about. The creditor is putting in his claim, and I suppose in a way that would be a righteous claim. The woman did not dispute the claim of the creditor, the difficulty was how to meet it. So she comes to the prophet and he says, What have you in the house? Well, she says, only a pot of oil. She says first of all, "Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant feared Jehovah". Notice that, she referred to the death of her husband. Then she says she has only a pot of oil in the house; that is all she had. This pot of oil obviously has come down from her husband; he has died but the pot of oil is there. How did the pot of oil become available through the death of her husband? It is through the death of Christ. I appeal to you young people, through the death of Christ the oil has become available. She did not value it but she will. "My husband is dead": I bring this forward as an appeal to our affection that it is through the death of Christ the oil has come down to us, but she does not value it. That is a challenge to every one of us as to how much valuation I have for the One who is here so

concerned about the maintenance of the light, the maintenance of the testimony. You can be sure it will be maintained in spite of you or me. He is faithful enough but it is through the death of Christ. I would urge this upon us. Although He may be slighted He is not here lightly, He is here concerned that the light might be maintained. "Thy handmaid has not anything at all in the house but a pot of oil.

And he said Go borrow for thyself vessels abroad from all thy neighbours, empty vessels; let it not be few; and go in, and shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and pour out into all those vessels, and set aside what is full". Now visualise this sight; here she is with this pot of oil, at one time not very valuable in her sight, her very language was defeatist - 'not anything at all in the house but a pot of oil'. She did not have a real valuation of it. I think we need to be wakened up, beloved brethren, as I said about the young man, he was wakened as a man out of his sleep. The woman is wakened out of her sleep, out of her indifference and defeatist attitude, so to speak. That is a snare upon us. You accept things as they are. We should not do that, we should not accept things as they are, we should aim at being vital and having a supply, not to be defeatists but wakened up to what is really available or what is valuable, what is of tradable value - that is the idea. It is worth something. It says, "shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons": that is another important thing, you know what it is to go in behind the shut door. Do not forget to go in behind the shut door and have an experience. Now notice that what is at stake here is these two sons, not the widow; it is their lives, the careers of these sons, that are at stake. The creditor has certain claims and these would be righteous in a way, but what is at stake is the sons. Dear brethren, we want to keep that in mind, that what is at stake is the young people and we want them to be sons of oil, not just ordinary, not just average. I have said before that we should not accept the average, we should be more than average; sons of oil means that you are vital and that you have some spiritual supply. Now spiritual supply is obtained by industry, you get it by digging, by begging. Do not be afraid of these things, do not be afraid to work and have something in the way of a spiritual supply. There they are behind the shut door. You can imagine it,

visualise the scene of the mother, and she is pouring out the oil into vessel after vessel. What are they learning? She is learning of course the value of what the pot of oil is, but they are learning too.

They would be amazed, vessel after vessel; no matter how many there were there was plenty of oil. After they were all filled the oil stayed. The Spirit is here, He is staying, He is not going, we will all go together and He will go too. But for the moment He is staying, He is available. What wealth is available! Now in this process you can understand what these two sons would be learning behind the shut door. I ask the young people: How much time do you spend behind the shut door? That is what you are told to do in Matthew, to go into your closet and shut the door (see chap 6: 6). How much time do you give to that? You will learn behind the shut door; in company with divine Persons you will learn the true value of things, you will get the priorities right and you will see that something is needed for the maintenance of the light and you gain something, you acquire substance. I commend this to us all. I have to admit my lack in this, but still I am obliged to say a word to you about it. We want to get in behind the shut door. I think four times in this chapter you have the shut door referred to; that enforces the thing upon us. The woman with the son dead went in and shut the door. We need this secret history. We used to hear a lot about the need for it when I was young. It is vital. If I am to have oil at all, and if I contribute my part to the light, it is vital that I have oil and I learn the value of it behind the shut door; in secret with God, in secret with the Lord, in secret with the Spirit you learn what you have. She has this now and she goes to the prophet and tells him the outcome of the experience, and he says, "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy sons on the rest". What a portion! - able to meet every obligation, that is paying your debt, here for the will of God, here for His pleasure. You can do that for yourself, for your own peace; but then too, living on the rest: that is eternal life and sonship. Meeting your obligations on the one hand but then living on the rest you enjoy eternal life and sonship.

The next woman in this chapter is offered to be spoken of to the king or to the captain of the host. He said we will promote you in this world. She says, You cannot promote me, I dwell among my own people; she is in the good of eternal life. She said, You could not add to my satisfaction, you could not add to my pleasure, I dwell among my own people. Oh, what a portion it is to be amongst the brethren! All this is necessary in view of the maintenance of the light.

Now another thing I want to bring up is what we get in Matthew 25 where there are these five wise and five foolish virgins, and the crisis comes when the foolish have no oil in their vessels and they speak to the prudent. They have great advice to give. I think if you are behind the shut door, and you learn something as to the value of the Spirit, you can give counsel, you can give good advice. So when the foolish ask for oil they say, "Give us of your oil, for our torches are going out. But the prudent answered saying, We cannot": now notice that that is a very important matter - "we cannot". It is not transmissible in that sense; I cannot give it to you or you to me.

Notice: "Go rather to those that sell and buy for yourselves". Now there are those that are selling the oil, they are not giving it away they are selling it. "Go rather to those that sell"; there are those who are selling it. Now this is very interesting. I cannot communicate to you or you to me as I said, but there are those who sell. Dear brethren, the Father and the Son are those who sell and unless we have to do with Them, those that sell, the Father and the Son, we will not have it. What transactions are there between us and this wonderful economy of ours where the oil is available on this basis of having a transaction with those that sell? How touching - those that sell. You have to part with something, you have to surrender something; your money, your time, whatever it might be, you have to give something in exchange for the oil. It is not given away. That is true also in Revelation chapter 3 where the Lord is selling things, He is not giving them away. They are to be obtained on this principle. I commend this to us, that the Father and the Son are concerned that you and I might be vitally in the testimony and contributing to the light that is to be maintained right down to the end; continually, it

says, that there might be no lessening of it, and I can have part in that. Oh, I wish I could raise your interest in this matter as to what is here in the way of the testimony of our Lord and I can have my part in that and its maintenance in the light of it, but it is only by way of being sons of oil.

What are these two sons of oil in the prison in Acts 16? Pure beaten olive oil; Paul said "Having beaten us publicly" (v 37). They were beaten yet what light shone out in that prison in the middle of the night. The light is to be maintained continually, it never went out. Look at these two sons of oil there, how wonderful! And the prisoners listened to them. There was an earthquake, they were wakened up, everybody was wakened up. I think we need waking up as to the urgency of the moment. There might have been an excuse for Paul and Silas to let the light not shine, but it shone in all its brilliance, pure beaten olive oil. How wonderful! So no matter what the circumstances might be we can have our part in this wonderful privilege, but responsibility too is upon us to bring pure beaten olive oil.

May we therefore be encouraged as well as feeling our obligation to our committal to things and our determination to have it in view of the light shining. Would you not want to have a part in this dark day when there is so much departure and so much unfaithfulness to the Lord that His testimony might be maintained? Surely we should find it in our hearts, dear brethren, in affection for Christ, to make way for the Spirit and have something in the way of spiritual supply for the maintenance of the testimony. It is a wonderful privilege and it will not always be accorded us, but it is accorded us now in difficult conditions and heartlessness for Christ, that there may be that with us in determination to bring this oil for the light. May we all be encouraged therefore and helped forward in this matter and find not only that we are having our part in it but to the satisfaction of our own souls we enjoy eternal life and enjoy sonship too. May He bless the word.

NEW YORK

16 April 1988

CROWNED CHILDREN

Many schoolchildren will have learned that one of the kings of England, when a boy of only nine years of age, was crowned at Gloucester with his mother's bracelet. The great crown of the Realm had been lost with other jewels at the time when the royal party had crossed the Wash. Many years before this, Joash, one of the kings of Judah, was crowned at the age of only seven years, during which time he had been kept in hiding because of wicked persons. His name means 'whom God supports', and he was certainly supported as a good king whilst he was subject to God's will and helped the priests in His temple service and worship.

Crowns of royalty such as those referred to are not often mentioned in Scripture. In the New Testament especially, a crown represents some distinction or celebrates a victory. Paul wrote that the saints in Philippi were his "joy and crown" because his ministry had led to their conversion. It is possible that a believer reading these words may be distinguished in Heaven's sight as the crown of one who has been used in this way of blessing. In any case every Christian should be contending as in a foot-race for a crown which will never perish as did the old Greek crowns made of leaves.

We often sing the words: -

'Jesus, Thy head, once crowned with thorns,
Is crowned with glory now;
Heav'n's royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow'.

The scarlet robe arrayed on Jesus was removed again, but it seems that He still wore the crown of thorns when on the cross. This was all in mockery, but is the crucified One the true King and Victor in your heart?

J.C.Evershed