

A
WORD
IN ITS
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"OUR COMMONWEALTH" – II

Genesis 13: 14-18; 14: 14-24; 15: 3-8, 13-21; 18: 1-8, 16-19

J.A.G. I thought we might see how enlargement comes about in these Old Testament saints through to the point in chapter 18 where Abraham is equal to and can sustain a divine visitation and moves in the full confidence of God. There is a Philippian touch here in the way that in gentleness he gives way to Lot. He is not engaged in personal feelings or animosity. The yieldingness that marks him is very beautiful. God comes in and supports him immediately. Lot chose the plain of the Jordan, "all the plain of the Jordan". As we were saying in the previous reading, that might bear on those who mind earthly things; Abraham is related to heavenly things. God says to him, Now, you lift up your eyes and look around, this is all coming to you on the principle of gift, divine giving. He takes up his position in relation to that, and his whole life is becoming regulated by the divine thought and purpose and becoming stabilized in relation to it. In chapter 14 he is moving out, in principle having experience in Romans 5, and he is able to recover his brother and all his property, and he finds a new experience as divine support comes to him through the priesthood of Melchisedec in the king's valley – another evidence, no doubt, of lowliness of mind, showing in principle that the mind which was in Christ Jesus was having its way with him; and he is beginning to be caught up in the thoughts of God in relation to sonship. In the next chapter his enlargement continues as he looks towards the heavens. God leads him out and continues in the end of the chapter to show, in expansion and understanding of detail, the borders of the land that was going to be his. This leads us through to chapter 18 where he is in his tent-door in the heat of the day, in type reigning in life by the one Man, Jesus Christ; not overcome but ready for this wonderful visitation that comes his way.

I wondered if that would be acceptable.

L.McF. That is very helpful. I was thinking of the feature of strangership; the commonwealth is in heaven but down here is strangership.

J.A.G. Yes, I think that is right, citizens above but strangers below. And as that is the case he gets much more and it is all secure and stable and eternal in character. We touch the purpose of God in the reference to Hebron which was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. Lot is not related to it; he has in mind that things look like the land of Egypt and he goes on to Sodom, which we are not to engage ourselves with but to see how God comes in in confirming grace as we move in relation to the commonwealth.

J.A.P. Stephen said it was "The God of glory", Acts 7: 2. Maybe you would say something about that.

J.A.G. That is very beautiful. The God of glory appeared to him when he was in the land of the Chaldeans. That outshines anything that relates to the world in any shape or form. The God of glory is known in the commonwealth, is He not? Finally it is the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. What a position that is!

J.A.P. It seems to me that Stephen said that in the light of Christianity. We can say things now in the light of Christianity, as the truth is in Jesus.

J.A.G. Yes I think so. These things were written as types for us upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Abraham is moving into a position here and his links with God are standing related to it.

T.E.D. Stephen says to those persons in Acts 7: "into this land in which ye now dwell" (v 4). Is that a test for us at the present time as to whether we are just dwelling in things outwardly or are coming into them in accord with the purpose of God?

J.A.G. I think so; the vitality of the thing is what we have to be concerned about. The power and influence of what is heavenly is to have its way with us, our hearts are to be attracted into it. There are the oaks of Mamre; they have been there a long time, they are stable. We move our tents, we change our circumstances, we take them up in relation to this position. God has spoken to him and said that He would make his seed as the dust of the earth: "Arise, walk through the land according to the length of it and according to the

breadth of it; for I will give it to thee". Then he moves in relation to that promise.

K.A.O. You mentioned what Jehovah said to Abraham: "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art". Would you say how that may apply to us currently in the testimony.

J.A.G. I think 'the place where thou art' is the state of soul in which he was. There was the evidence of the Spirit of Christ in him; he was not contentious, he was gentle, his gentleness was to be known of all. God can add to that state and cause it to increase and give an increased apprehension of the greatness of the divine system. The Canaanite was still in the land of course, and Abraham is to look at things in the power of faith, and he does that and he moves in relation to it. Therefore faith is active in him in relation to the truth.

He is being confirmed and consolidated in his soul and strengthened, so that when the circumstances of the next chapter come about he is not engaged with them, he is above them. He is related to the things that are morally above.

K-n.A.O. Is Abraham not a great help to us as believers at the present time in understanding the commonwealth? He had the promise that God was going to give him the land but he never really lived to see that in his own life, and yet he went through, he enjoyed what God had, he enjoyed the land, the fruits of it, he lived in it. The Canaanite was still there but he lived there, he had that light. Is that something that he would help us with as to how we understand things at the present time?

J.A.G. I think so; he comes on to the light and glory of the knowledge of Christ risen and that everything is established in Him.

That is not only that he knows it but his links with God are in relation to that which is very mature and perfect. You might say that in chapter 18 he is amongst the perfect: "As many... as are perfect", Paul says, "let us be thus minded", Phil 3: 15. He is going on to perfection, to full growth. The Lord is not going to come to a dwarf position, He is coming to a mature assembly position that is ready for

Him, that is the bride. There is to be fervency of affection and as we move on this line I think we will find that we are being developed in it.

C.S.E. I was wondering if faith links with this line of enjoyment of the commonwealth. Hebrews 11 records a great line of what persons were subjected to, what they suffered, but it says of them "of whom the world was not worthy" (v 38). If we have a sense of where we belong, would that help us as to the judgment of this present scene and keep us going in greater liberty?

J.A.G. I think that would be how it works out, as we see the greatness and glory of what belongs to the inheritance, what the assembly is and we move practically in relation to it. He has in a way to change his circumstances here: "Then Abram moved his tents, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron", and his links with God stand related to that.

G.D.P. The psalmist tells us to "Walk about Zion... Mark ye well her bulwarks", Ps 48: 12,13. We could be in the present enjoyment of that, could we not?

J.A.G. I think that is a very encouraging psalm to refer to and no doubt it relates to the things that are above. We are to set our minds on things above, walk about Zion, have a look at her towers, consider her bulwarks, see the strength and vitality and substantiality of the position.

L.McF. What is to be learned from the fact. that Jehovah spoke to Abraham after Lot had separated himself from him?

J.A.G. I think God is giving him great confirmation in his movements, delighting in him really. He calls him His friend, does He not: "Abraham, my friend", Isa 41: 8? We should look for this kind of thing. I think we come into the realm of divine communication and manifestation on this line. So that things are not stale, they do not get jaded, there is vitality and life and fervency Before Samuel's day a vision was not frequent (see 1 Sam. 3: 1); that is not normal. It is normal that there should be divine communications, something fresh and vital coming out in the souls of the brethren. It causes exercise, it causes movement in the truth.

J.McK. It is recorded of Abraham that he looked for a city that had foundations whose artificer and constructor is God (see Heb 11: 10). We find in Revelation 21 that the foundation was of the twelve apostles of the Lamb and there was a great and high wall. I was thinking of the principle of separation. The wall is to keep out everything that belongs to this world and the enemy, yet maintaining what is inside for the pleasure of God.

J.A.G. Yes, exactly. The great ministry of the twelve, the Pentecostal ministry, was Jesus Christ raised from amongst the dead. There is only one Man out of death, everything is to be centred on Him.

J.McK. So Paul said to the Corinthians, "For other foundation can no man lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ", 1 Cor 3: 11. It is remarkable that the Lord referred to Abraham in that way, he rejoiced to see My day and was glad (see John 8: 56).

J.A.G. Yes exactly. So he is going on and he is going to be complete as regards the fruit of righteousness for Jesus Christ's day; he is going to be for God's glory and praise.

S.E.H. Is it significant that Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain whereas Abraham came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre? Hebrews tells us that he waited for the city that has foundations whereas Lot's city was on the plain.

J.A.G. Lot is all beclouded because he did not have very much conviction in his movements. But Abraham knows how to judge of and approve the things that are more excellent; he is on that up line, being complete as regards the fruit of righteousness, which is for God's glory and praise (see Phil 1: 11).

K-n.A.O. Is there something in the fact that Lot separated himself from Abraham rather than Abraham separating from Lot?

J.A.G. Abraham said to Lot, We are not going to have contention, "Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if to the left then I will take the right"; I count on God in my circumstances. Abraham's gentleness is known of all he evidences the wisdom that comes

down from above, it is pure, it is gentle, and he finds divine support on that line. The going down line is the line that God supports as far as anything public is concerned.

K-n.A.O. Would it also be right to say that they that mind earthly things, who have the character of Lot, are not content with what is heavenly? Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan. It was a distinct matter with him, he was not content to be with Abraham in relation to this commonwealth.

J.A.G. He became overburdened with earthly things; the apostle says in the parenthesis that they are enemies of the cross of Christ (see Phil 3: 18). They want to settle down on the earth and have a bit of nature and try and incorporate it into the divine system, whereas the whole thing is spiritual.

G.H. As regards separation it says in Genesis 1: 3-5 "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good; and God divided between the light and the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night".

The fact that separation between light and darkness comes in so early in Scripture would indicate that it is a very important principle with God.

J.A.G. I think so. You cannot operate very much in darkness; God brings in light. Abraham is in the light and the next chapter shows that he is abiding in the light. "He that loves his brother abides in light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him", 1 John 2: 10.

There is no occasion of stumbling in Abraham. There are plenty of occasions of stumbling in Lot but he is not really the subject of our conversation at this time. We should seek some help to find out about Abraham's movements. He saw the land, he had this word from God and he moved his tents. There is a divinely-supported movement in answer to the light that was presented to him. He has moved and he is dwelling now by the oaks of Mamre which are in Hebron. He is thoroughly related to the divine system and his links with God are there. So you would say he has faith in the Lord Jesus

and love towards all the saints (see Eph 1: 15). That is the basis, you might say, of Paul's prayers for the Ephesians.

J.A.P. There is some difference, is there not, between earthliness – the earthly line that is referred to in Philippians – and the world. Maybe you could help us about that.

J.A.G. Well, there is some difference but we can say that the one leads quickly into the other. It is not long before Lot is pitching tents as far as Sodom, and then he is in the gate of Sodom. Still, he is a Christian, he has unleavened bread and he is called righteous Lot, but that is no place for a Christian, no place for somebody to live who is in the light of the call of God in the glad tidings. Those two and a half tribes that are prepared to settle down in natural circumstances, living conditions outside of God's thoughts for them and finding their life there, are the first to be carried away captive.

G.H. In relation to what has been said as to the earth and the world, does not the thought of the world give the moral side? In John's gospel, as you know, the world is very much mentioned.

J.A.G. The great appeal by Paul is to let your mind be on the things that are above and not on the things that are on the earth (see Col 3: 2). I may be wrong but I do not think the world troubles the brethren very much but the earth may trouble us quite a bit. What would you say?

J.A.P. I find that. Certain things may be right in themselves. A Christian can never sanctify his circumstances in a wrong area. Lot could not sanctify the area in which he put himself. Sanctification, as I understand it, means that you are moving in separation. I observe this with myself and others: People say, I am not worldly. Thank God if there is not that terrible element, for the whole world lies in the wicked one. But the earthly things are very pernicious; it affects your clothing, your house, your manner of life, whether you are taking character from what is earthly.

J.A.G. Well, I have the same problem so I do not know that I could help you. But it is a thing that we need constantly to be on our guard about, the intrusion of it tends to keep us from the heavenly realm.

J.McK. Paul encourages the Thessalonian saints in the second epistle; he says "God has chosen you from the beginning", chap 2: 13. The call to Abraham is "to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth".

J.A.G. Exactly: that is to be the paramount matter with us. We should begin to regulate everything, our whole circumstances, from the point of view of the gospel and then from the point of view of the assembly. That brings up the matter about attending the meetings and what we link on with and what we do not. We naturally are somewhat weak and think that if we do not touch this and that, we are going to lose out on things that relate to the earth. God is more than able to sustain us.

J.McK. That is what I was thinking, that we are called by God; those He foreordained He has called. Faithfulness is necessary in the saints to answer to the call God has given them and has brought them into the sphere of salvation which for the present moment is the assembly. We have to maintain by the Spirit this sanctification from the very world into which Lot went.

J.A.G. Yes. Therefore it brings up what we were saying in the earlier reading, that if we move on this line we are saved in the power of His life, saved in the power of the risen life of Christ. As to our circumstances we should go the way of discipleship – in Matthew's gospel, where God would relieve us from the pressure of concern over them. He would have us to be righteous in circumstances, but it says "your heavenly Father knows ye have need of all these things" (chap 6: 32) and "the hairs of the head are all numbered", Matt 10: 30. But we do not just believe that; you may get a good opportunity for profit and think you must go and take it up and you are not too keen on sanctification. We are tested as to whether our hearts are wholly and thoroughly set on the things that are above.

J.McK. Isaiah says that Jehovah shall be the stability of our times (see chap 33: 6). If we look for stability around we will find, as Luther said, Christ is the rock on which I stand – 'all other ground is

sinking sand'. We want to maintain the stability that the Lord spoke of to Peter in Matthew 16: "on this rock I will build my assembly" (v 18).

J.A.G. Very good. "In Jah, Jehovah, is the rock of ages" the prophet says, Isa 26: 4. "He shall be the stability of thy times". It is all right saying that when we are just about ready to draw the pension, because you are sure of it every week, but there are young people growing up and getting married, and they need mortgages and they need work and they have to be righteous in it; they have to work; God never supports laziness or idleness. If they commit themselves to God and seek in their circumstances to be regulated by the truth and the light of the assembly, they will find God coming in and making way for them. These things have been proved time and time again. You should go around and ask any of the oaks of Mamre and they will tell you about it.

K.N.P. Is it important then that the first thing Abraham did after he moved was that he built an altar?

J.A.G. Exactly, the first thing he did; he was going to be with God about his move and he is getting consolidated. Say more about it.

K.N.P. I was thinking about what is earthly and how we work things out; it has often been said that, if you put first things first, everything else will work out. Examples can be given; it was seen in persons like Solomon who were concerned for God and His people first and then many other things were added. Do you think that should be our objective?

J.A.G. I think so. The moral line is love for God, love for the truth, love for the brethren, and as we are regulated from that point of view the whole area of circumstances is in God's hand. You can strive – I have done it myself – you push for a thing and you get nothing but frustration and more frustration till the Lord says, I told you so, you might as well not have bothered.

K-n.A.O. Is that something that Abraham learned too about his circumstances? Earlier, in chapter 12, he went down to Egypt;

perhaps he was worried about being preserved in the land because of famine, but then he learned something from that experience.

J.A.G. Yes, nothing but big trouble. He took Hagar out of Egypt. Well, God turns it into blessing; tribulation was working endurance with him, I suppose. I think there is an allusion to that in the trained servants that he had in his house. He had all these employees that he could use and yet he went down to Egypt where he had nothing but trouble.

L.McF. So there is the feature of contentment, he dwelt by the oaks of Mamre and then he dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob. Here is a man counting on God in relation to his circumstances. He is sitting by the tent-door in the heat of the day.

J.A.G. And God says, I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, I am not going to hide from him what I am going to do. I know Abraham, He said, this is the line of influence that is going to come right through in his seed. Young people may see opportunities and have the ability to go for them; they go for them under God and God helps them. That is all well and good, but the main regulating factor is the truth of the assembly.

K.A.O. We are tested in our local assemblies. Sometimes we adjust our meetings to suit our business. These things are practical, and I was wondering if what you are saying is to help us as to the commonwealth, that there should be (and one would desire to know more about it and appreciate it) the dignity that belongs to the assembly and our assemblies together and the value they are in relation to our salvation here on the earth.

J.A.G. It is good to think about that, to see the dignity that is proper to the assembly and the necessity for assembling in a right way.

You cannot have meetings if the brethren are not there. Wisdom comes in in the arrangements of meetings and times of meetings and so on. You cannot have the commonwealth in that sense without the brethren.

K-n.A.O. Is piety a feature which would mark the man who is in the gain of the commonwealth?

J.A.G. I think so. Piety comes out very much in all Abraham's history of course, but in chapter 19 he prays and he comes down to ten and he knows well that, if there are not more than ten, the city will have to be judged. But he is with God in the whole thing. Piety is a great matter, with contentment it is great gain. That does not belong to anybody naturally, you get it from God.

C.F.D. Would piety involve that I arrange my circumstances in relation to my responsibility Godward? Abraham came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre which are in Hebron; he arranged his circumstances to fit in with what God had in His mind. I think that is putting God first, or Christ first and the assembly first.

J.A.G. I think you see in principle that he is working out his life now in relation to the ministries of the recovery.

J.McK. Would you say he is moving in the light of the kingdom of heaven? Everything he had related to what was from heaven and he was answering to it and prepared to be in accord with it. So I thought the impress of the Spirit and the truth in these meetings would raise the question as to how I am answering, or going to answer, to what the Spirit as come from the presence of God would give us as an incentive to go on and keep going on; as Paul said, "Not that I have already obtained... but I pursue", Phil 3: 12.

J.A.G. Yes; and that is because the Spirit's normal service is being experienced; and the normal service of the Spirit is, "He shall glorify me", John 16: 14. There is no point in pushing anybody into this, or pushing them into anything; it comes from the attractive ness of Christ and the power of His love that draws us away to where He is.

C.F.D. Abraham came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron: would it be that the service of God, which the altar might refer to, is flowing out of an ordered line of things locally? The oaks of Mamre would involve the seal of the Spirit, not a line of disorder, and we are dwelling there, we are restfully there, and the service of God flows out of those conditions, does it not?

J.A.G. I think so; he is standing related to the whole line of things that belongs to God's purpose. Why should it say that Hebron was

built seven years before Zoan in Egypt? He is in relation to that, he is touching the secret side, the secret inward side that the Colossian epistle develops, and he is going to be "rooted and built up in him", Col 2: 7. What a thing that is!

E.F.C. I like that expression you used earlier about his being the heavenly man unofficially. He seems to move instinctively towards this new location; and then as hearing about his brother Lot having difficulty and having chosen this earthly line of things, he is tender in relation to him and seeks to recover him. What would you say as to that?

J.A.G. I think that is very beautiful. There is no animosity, there is no reproach, there is no saying to Lot, I knew you had all that coming to you; there is nothing like that. His gentleness is still known of all. He has moral power and authority. "And he divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and smote them, and pursued them as far as Hobah which is to the left of Damascus. And he brought back all the property". There is a man who has moral influence. He can go to Lot and talk with him and he can impart the spirit of Christ to him. So Lot is brought back from that position. There are alien influences, powerful alien influences that drag the brethren into the world, into Sodom, or into Damascus, into whatever it might be. This is a man who is able to go and recover them; and as he does that he finds great help and fresh experience of the greatness of divine grace in the service of Melchisedec.

J.McK. So the psalmist could say, "thy condescending gentleness hath made me great", Ps 18: 35. And Paul, in appealing to the Corinthians, besought them by the meekness and gentleness of the Christ (see 2 Cor 10: 1).

J.A.G. Very fine! The Lord Jesus stooped, He wrote on the ground and He lifted Himself up, and He said, "Let him that is without sin among you first cast the stone", John 8: 7. He stooped and He wrote again and no one was left there. That is how He treated the woman. Abraham in that sense is exuding divine grace and love.

E.F.C. He seems to come in for this priestly support of Christ – as we would say typically – as a result of being faithful toward his brother and seeking him out. But he is still firm in his conviction that he is going to have nothing to do with the king of Sodom; he is not going to be enticed into any affiliation or link with him.

J.A.G. He is always finding strength in faith. Here is the one who is assimilated to the Son of God. How glorious that is, to get strengthened by the Lord Jesus in His priestly grace, the One who is the Son of God! You are lifted far above any of the overtures of the king of Sodom or answering to anything that he can present. What a man Abraham was! He would have had to judge in himself the propensities of Lot, because the tendencies in Abraham would be the same as Lot's – to go down to Egypt and expand and go right on; and even though you live in Sodom it does not seem to be too bad.

But he is not like that, he has judged the whole thing. He is committed and is answering to the call increasingly and he has this wonderful experience in the king's valley.

A.S.H. What do we learn from "one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew"?

J.A.G. I suppose it would be some element of affinity with him, somebody who knew that he could help. Abram, the Hebrew, I suppose, shows that that is how he was known – as a person who stood related to the gospel. You might hear about somebody, somebody might escape, something might come to your hearing and you would like to go and help a person. You have that kind of feelings, they are the feelings of Christ; the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is flowing through Abraham.

A.R.S. Abraham is spoken of as the father of all those that believe (see Rom 4: 11). Does that mean that we should take character from such a man?

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. It is a good thing to refer to that because there is the expression of care and concern and fatherliness for Lot. He cared for his brother and we should think about the brethren in that way.

K.A.O. Were these features seen in Paul in Acts 20 where even though they were discoursing he was still able to come down to the boy that fell.

J.A.G. Yes, and he says his life is in him. They may have given him up; we give people up, we give young folks up and say, There is nothing in him. No, there is something there if you can touch it. His life is in him and he fell upon him and embraced him. The brethren were no little comforted. That is a great encouragement.

K.A.O. There is great need amongst us of being comforted, and being confirmed too. I wonder if we should be more committed to our local gatherings and to the assembly in which we through grace find our lot, that this should be our outlook in the main – to confirm the brethren and to bring in food and what would build them up in relation to the truth.

J.A.G. I think that is the main line of things in the ministry – that the brethren should be fed and built up in the truth. There should never be any element of fear gendered amongst the brethren, afraid to come to a meeting, or anything like that; there should be desire to gravitate to the assemblings.

T.E.D. You are thinking that this line of recovery is something that is needed now and the working out of the commonwealth would help us in the development of right feelings and priestly understanding in view of the recovery of our brethren.

J.A.G. I think so. Abraham has resource, he has three hundred and eighteen trained servants, born in his house. It seems to me that here is a man who has come into the gain of Romans 5, he knows that tribulation works endurance, and endurance experience. That is all his work, those are all his servants, so he will lead them all out. He will go and get hold of Lot and sit down and chat with him and talk with him, and the influence of these Satanic powers is overcome. Not only Lot but all his property, all that he has, is brought back into fellowship, you might say – a very practical matter.

T.E.D. Would you help us as to what these allies that he has mean.

J.A.G. I think that all relates to the common wealth, those are his associations of life. He does not compromise with Lot or anything like that, he is moving from this heavenly level. Mr Taylor spoke about the hill-country and linked Philippians with it. If you go to the beginning of Luke, there you are, that is the commonwealth, the kind of life that these people lived – Mary and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna – that is the level of their life.

T.E.D. That – the hill of God – is available weekly; that is another distinctive feature weekly.

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. And the meetings are what we make them. If I come along to the meeting without any exercise and sit down and expect miracles to happen I am going to be greatly disappointed. I come in exercise of soul as to what is going on amongst the brethren, I move my tents by the oaks of Mamre and I am interested in getting a knowledge, an outline you might say of sound words, in relation to the truth. Not that I am going to come and pour out whatever I have read – that is not the idea – but I know what the truth is and I have some idea now of what is right and what is wrong and that substance is something that the Lord and the Spirit can move in and enlarge. That is what is happening to Abraham here.

T.E.D. I think you have touched on a very important subject. So that you live in an area which shows that you are really interested and then as the saints come up together you carry the meeting with you in the sense that you are interested, you have gone to the reservoir maybe, you have looked at a few things, you have done a little reading, you have certainly prayed. Mr Taylor said, Read the scripture twice before you come. I think in that sense you would come up as an exercised person that the Spirit of God can link on with.

J.A.G. Yes, I think so. I thought he said, Read the scripture three times and the synopsis once – which is a very good thing to do. But you are not going to be bound; if you go up and say, This is how it has to go, the meeting has to go this way because this is what I have read, and if anything comes in I take my little brush and sweep it off

the table, that is not the thing, you are to be in the flow of the Spirit. In Jeremiah 31 it says, "They... shall flow together to the goodness of Jehovah" (v 12). Look for the Lord's leading.

R.N.H. Paul says to Timothy: "Keep by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted", 2 Tim 1: 14. I was thinking of your earlier reference to the gift in relation to Abraham, whether we all by way of our measure of experience have some deposit that we can bring into a setting such as this and thus have greater regard for the gift of God.

J.A.G. That is very helpful. "To each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ", Eph 4: 7.

Now that is your working capital, that is what you trade with. You have that gift, that ability, and you start doing business, in that sense, in the truth and you find that that increases. You are not thinking, He has a great deal more than I have, I can hardly say anything, I am half scared even to make a remark. No, work with what you have and it will increase; that is how things get built up. Finally you come to the fact that the body builds it self up – "for its self-building up in love", Eph 4: 16. Christianity is a complete and full – time occupation, it is your life. It is not something special that has to be laid on for going to the meetings; you live in these things. That is what Abraham did, he dwelt by the oaks of Mamre which are in Hebron. His life was in relation to that and he was being built up in his soul in relation to it. So that he is man enough now to go along and see Lot and he has the wherewithal. As he does that he proves the Lord's support and priestly grace. That is a marvellous thing.

A.S.H. So it is of the greatest importance as to where we dwell, where we live.

J.A.G. Yes, that is very fine.

J.A.P. One of the remarks about Abraham in the good teaching is that he dwelt as a stranger in the land of promise, which it has been said showed that he was really a heavenly man. I think Abraham has a great place in our own dispensation, and I wondered about the expression in Romans 4, after several things said about Abraham,

"who is father of us all" (v 16). Is that wider than just the Jewish nation?

J.A.G. I think so. Abraham here is going on and he is going to have his name changed to 'father of a multitude' (see chap 17: 5). In chapter 13 it is the dust of the earth: "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth", but in chapter 15 it is the stars, look up, something further, the heavenly side of the kingdom is before us. Then at the close of chapter 15 there is great detail about the land: "Unto thy seed I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river".

Things are getting defined in his soul and he is increasing in his apprehension and his understanding of them.

J.A.P. I think that should lift us all up this afternoon. Really God revealed to Abraham things outside his own dispensation. That is the thing we want to get lifted up to, brethren, the great things we are connected with and that divine grace has given us part in them, and we want them for others.

J.A.G. Exactly. So we are to walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham. Here he is, one step after another he is going right through to chapter 18 and further.

J.R.C. So his concern in chapter 15 is in regard of sonship.

J.A.G. I thought that was very interesting – it just came to me as I was sitting here – God is so pleased with Abraham and he is beginning to catch on to what is really in God's mind about sonship.

He has this exercise, it is stirring up in him. He says, I have just this Eliezer, "I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus... Lo, to me thou hast given no seed, and behold, a son of my house will be mine heir". God has greater things in mind but Abraham is getting the germ of it. If we get the trend of that in the meeting we will find that the whole position is working together towards the development of the family side of things in the truth.

L.D.P. I was just wondering if Luke 2 would fit in with what you are saying as to Christianity being something that is practised at all times. It says as to Anna "who did not depart from the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers" (v 37).

J.A.G. That is right; I think that scripture greatly helps. With these people that was their life. Simeon was a man in Jerusalem, that is where he lived. Something had been made known to him, divinely communicated to him by the Holy Spirit. That is the realm of divine communication. I think we are probably greatly lacking in that – divine impartation and communication.

L.D.P. I appreciate what you said because it is something that is lived continuously.

J.A.G. It is not that persons become super spiritual or anything like that. Enoch walked with God in the normal vicissitudes and circumstances of everyday life. He had a family and then it says again that he walked with God. So that Christianity is essentially practical and workable here in the everyday circumstances of life. That is the Philippian epistle.

G.D.P. Is that seen in Abraham? You were saying we do not come with our minds made up; he had to be adjusted in relation to sonship and the heir of his house, did he not?

J.A.G. Yes, because he was the same as we are. God sets on something and you think you could help Him in it, instead of waiting patiently for God to work the thing out. Jacob excelled at that, you know, he always wanted to help things on in his zeal for the truth, and God had to restrain him and finally bring him round.

G.H. It says about Enoch that "he has the testimony that he had pleased God", Heb 11: 5. It is put in the present tense, showing the freshness and the glory of it.

J.A.G. I think that is very helpful because it would be known in the commonwealth. As we are in the gain of that there would be the conscious testimony that we are there and we have the divine pleasure.

J.R.C. This son was to come out of his own body: What does that mean?

J.A.G. We know that it was beyond the hopes of nature. It relates to promise, does it not?

J.R.C. I was wondering whether there is responsibility with us as to how we are working out the truth, as we are exhorted to do today for example. We want to see that developing in our localities. In other words what I am enjoying I want to see the young people enjoying. Is there sonship coming through on that line?

J.A.G. It comes through on that line. It says he found strength in faith, he stumbled not at the word through unbelief. Unbelief is a tremendous thing. Infidelity is in all our hearts. Very often you go a certain distance and then you say, No, I do not know that I could believe that. But it does not say that about Abraham; he stumbled not at the word through unbelief, but having found strength in faith he gave glory to God (see Rom 4: 20). Now that is a marvellous thing, it works.

K.N.P. We have not said anything about chapter 18.

J.A.G. Those are the kind of meetings we should aim at I suppose, because primarily, whatever the meeting is, there should be something for God in it first. Abraham is very comely in the way that he moves, ready for an appearing. He sat at the tent-door in the heat of the day. What pleasure it is for God as He has man recovered to Himself in this way. He has great substance and wealth and it is all at God's disposal, it is all for God. All these precious features of Christ that he has acquired, his moving in the energy and light of the promise, and the force of circumcision, are experienced and known by him. So you might say of him, "we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in flesh", Phil 3: 3.

G.H. It says " And Jehovah appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre". Would the oaks speak of divine stability?

J.A.G. Yes I think so. Abraham would say, It was worth the move in chapter 13, moving my tents to the oaks of Mamre and living in Hebron. He has grown up, he has come along with these men whom the Lord raised up in the recovery. "As many therefore as are perfect" (Phil 3: 15): here he is!

E.F.C. He seems to be on easy terms with God in this chapter after the question of the son has been resolved and after the experience of circumcising himself and his household.

J.A.G. Yes. There is nothing to disturb the intimacy he has with God. He is in the gain, I suppose, of the scripture in Romans 5, he has substance, the wherewithal to minister to God's pleasure, he is able to sustain a divine appearing and detain divine Persons.

T.E.D. Is the gain resulting from chapter 17 verse 1: "I am the Almighty God: walk before my face, and be perfect... And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him"? Is this a side that we ought to seek help from the Lord to know more about?

J.A.G. Yes I think so. That is Philippians 3 I would say. Things that he counted gain on account of Christ, all the things that were gain to him he counted loss, and he goes on to say, As many as are perfect, let us be thus minded as you have us for a model.

K.A.O. An interesting thing in this section is that he did not have to be told to lift up his eyes. Should we be engaged with this line of things so that we are accustomed to looking up? I wonder if we are not too much concerned and overpowered by what may be down here. Abraham automatically lifted up his eyes.

J.A.G. I think so. Probably for us in principle it is the heat of the day; naturally, I suppose he would be overpowered, but it would show the place that the Spirit had with him. Because I think you can say through his actions in the chapter that there is evidence of headship in function with him. It is the impulse of the Spirit coming out in him.

S.E.H. In chapter 13 Jehovah told him to lift up his eyes; in this chapter he does it on his own initiative. He has certainly had to do with God in between these two chapters, his name had been changed to Abraham.

J.A.G. The more I think about it the more it appeals to me that he is giving expression in his actions to what Paul has in mind in

Philippians 3. The energy and activity that marks him show that he has the hope of the calling before him.

R.N.H. Would the three men standing near him, in principle for us, be the operation of the economy working for us in the commonwealth?

J.A.G. I think so. They have taken up their position in relation to him, in relation to this situation that he is in in which he has arrived at the fulness of the truth, you might say. So God says, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing? Since Abraham shall indeed become a great and mighty nation". I can confide in him. That is all proper to the commonwealth. Then he can go and conduct God to judgment. Mr Taylor said there had been quite a lot of people going along the concourse that day, but then there are Abraham and God and these other two men and they are going along too. He is thoroughly with God in his judgments: "as he is, we also are in this world", 1 John 4: 17.

J.A.P. The writer to the Hebrews uses this passage to encourage the brethren to hospitality and that is another feature of the associations of life, perhaps not on the level of the assembly but it can lead to that.

J.A.G. A very essential one, very essential that we extend hospitality to the brethren, entertain angels unaware.

J.A.P. Abraham took the lead in that in his house.

J.A.G. He did indeed. So that normally the houses of the brethren would be open and available, especially to young people, that they could go in there at any time.

G.H. You quoted that verse, "as he is, we also are in this world": what does that really mean?

J.A.G. Because he has boldness in the day of judgment. Yes, he has no doubts in his own conscience about Sodom, he has no links with it at all.

PREACHING

J.Gray

Isaiah 53: 12; Luke 22: 19,20; 10: 30-35

These three references to the thought of pouring impressed me as to how God acts from His side. There is no thought of stint, no thought of being limited in what He is doing. In fact Scripture says, "He scattereth abroad", as if showing the principle on which God is working: "He scattereth abroad", he giveth to the needy; his righteousness abideth for ever", Ps 112: 9. God is working in a large area. There is a large area in this town, all this builtup area, London and its outgoings. Thank God, indeed, for the word that is proclaimed and whoever may proclaim it! Thank God for His sovereignty in the preaching of the word! Who knows the result as the glad tidings are presented by anyone, even a tract given away?

It may be at a street corner or it may be at some of these crusades. In any case, we thank God, – as Paul did, that the glad tidings are proclaimed. "The entrance of thy words giveth light", Ps 119: 130. What is possible where the gospel is received!

Well, that is just to come to this point as to what we had today as to the blood: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you", Luke 22: 20. We used to sing that hymn:

'The very spear that pierced Thy side
Drew forth the blood to save'.

and it was found that that statement was not exactly correct because it would mean that it was the action of the wickedness of that soldier that was drawing forth the blood to save, whereas it was altered to:

'Though man in hatred pierced Thy side
Thy blood love's answer gave'.

(Hymn 230) That was the divine answer to the wickedness of men: the blood-shedding of Jesus was not exactly man's act. Peter says as to His blood, as we had this morning, "precious blood", 1 Pet.1: 19. Oh, the blessing that has come out of the preciousness of the

blood of Jesus "which is poured out for you". What that meant to the Saviour, the pouring out of His precious blood in view of your forgiveness: "To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood" – it is not the blood of someone else, it is His own blood – "and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and rather", Rev 1: 5. "Washed us from our sins": they are gone evermore!

There are so many scriptures which could be referred to. In the Old Testament as well as the New we get figurative speech showing that God has cast all our sins behind His back (see Isa 38: 17).

Again another scripture says that He has cast them into the depths of the sea (see Mic 7: 19). "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us", Ps 103: 12. Oh what a God! "Their sins and their lawlessnesses I will never remember any more", Heb 10: 17. Oh the value of the blood of Jesus! The power of the blood! It is efficacious enough to wash away the sins of every person that has ever lived. It may not be availed of, but that does not in any sense set aside the virtue and the efficacy of the blood of Jesus. What blood, the blood of Jesus! So it is a question of the power that is in the blood that I should like to emphasise.

It has appealed to me this day what it was that lay behind the Lord Jesus taking that place for you and for me, that great work of atonement, available for every one who trusts in Christ as their Saviour. "Without bloodshedding there is no remission", Heb 9: 22.

What was it? That was an act which came about as the Lord Jesus died. It was when He died, and yet the Lord Jesus speaks of the pouring out of His blood, but it is after He had died. It is an act which has been done, but what has impressed me is the feelings of the Saviour when He poured out His soul unto death. I do not know if I grasp deeply enough for myself the feelings of the soul – and I think the soul would be connected with the feelings – of the Saviour as He "poured out his soul". His soul was in the matter – poured it out "unto death", His holy soul!

How He could say in the gospel, " My soul is very sorrowful", Matt 26: 38. A blessed Man here, indeed God manifest in flesh, but

the reality of His manhood, the holy soul and the feelings of a Man, anticipating what lay before Him as approaching Calvary 's cross, and what was to be wrought out there. Well may He say, "My Father, if it be possible let t his cup pass from me" – I believe the Lord's soul was in that – "But not as I will, but as thou wilt", Matt 26: 39. Oh, the holy feelings of Jesus, pouring out His soul unto death and setting His face to go to Jerusalem to accomplish this. Who could understand it? Who could enter into the holy feelings of the soul of this blessed Man who was going to accomplish atonement and His precious blood was going to be shed?

'There is power, power, wonderworking power,
In the precious blood of the Lamb'.

It is there and it remains there.

The Psalms give us the experiences of the Saviour; Isaiah 53 would give us the feelings of the Saviour too. Oh the tremendousness of this matter – the feelings of Jesus anticipating death. We heard about sympathy these three days as meaning that you can share with a person in what they are passing through; you can enter into it. Who was going to share with Jesus as approaching Calvary's cross? Who could enter into the holy feelings of the soul of Jesus in His pouring out His soul unto death, holding nothing back in His holy feelings? Well may someone have said that His was a loneliness that none could share and with which none could sympathise and none could understand. It says that in Psalm 69 (v 20). The Lord Jesus did look for sympathy. Sometimes it was women who rose to the occasion when the Saviour needed refreshment. The disciples never really understood the Lord properly during His pathway, so how He appreciated that refreshment! If a woman came forward to wash His feet with tears and to anoint His feet and to wipe them with the hairs of her head, was it not just like "He shall drink of the brook in the way", Ps 110: 7? Just a little brook, a little refreshment! Oh how the Saviour appreciated that, His holy soul poured out unto death, but just a little on the way. But in the great work of atonement itself when He looked for sympathy there was none; comforters – none! Oh how

the Saviour felt that! I sometimes wonder if I have deepened much in my own soul as to the depth to which the Saviour went to save me. It is something that ought to grow in us. We sing, as one beloved man of God could compose:

'Yet deeper, if a calmer, joy
The Father's love shall raise'.

(Hymn 178)

There is a deepening of joy. I think there should be a deepening appreciation with us of the pouring out of the soul of Jesus unto death in view of His precious blood being made available for you and for me and for all man kind. How many have been brought in! How many have been deepened in their souls as they have come to trust the Saviour and meditated reflectively and prayerfully on what it cost the Saviour in these holy feelings of His!

Well may the psalmist say – it has impressed me often – in the Songs of Degrees beginning at 120 and going up to 134: "Out of the depths do I call upon thee". You might have thought that the Psalmist would have said this at the beginning of these Songs of Degrees which involve the idea of going upward, ascent, but it is in Psalm 130. Ten Psalms pass. I feel it would deepen, as it were anticipatively, in the psalmist's soul – and it should deepen in ours – as if after going forward he reaches Psalm 130 and comes to the point where he says, "Out of the depths do I call upon thee, Jehovah... If thou, Jah, shouldest mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?" he keeps that before him – "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared". It is good to go on, deepen even daily; never get away from what it has cost the Lord to redeem those who have put their trust in Him, what it cost Him in His soul the sufferings of Jesus, the ignominy and the cruelty of the death by the hands of men. What has the heart of man shown with his culture and education when in the midst of it all he can quite coolly and callously exterminate millions of Jews, just one batch after another? That is cultured man, educated man, whose heart remains adamant and hard – as scripture says, "The heart is deceitful above all things,

and incurable; who can know it?", Jer 17: 9. God knows it. He is a heart-knowing God. He knows your heart, what these hearts are capable of. Well, is there a place for Jesus in them? Does the Christ "dwell, through faith, in your hearts", Eph 3: 17? Is there a place where He is a guest, not just to be received and to go away again, but to reign there and to dwell there and to 'reign without a rival there'? That is our Saviour. That is the Saviour of God's providing – Jesus.

In Luke chapter 10 – a well-known passage – we get wonderful results, anticipative results of the gospel, because in the Samaritan we have one who is able not only to present the power that is in the blood of Jesus, to set free from sins, but who has feelings for the man that accompany that. If you proclaim the word you may not know about certain things in Scripture, but, oh, do I really have feelings for souls? I felt that as asked to say a word here. What can I say? Do I have feelings for souls? I trust I have. God has feelings. There are men in this world, Scripture says, who are past feelings, as if they could not be affected by the presentation of the gospel. Here it is first of all the priest. He comes down. What does Scripture tell us about the priest? He evidently looked at him Scripture tells us about the eyes of the priest. It tells us a lot about the priest. As Mr Darby said,

'Priests, that should plead for weakness,
Must Thine accusers be!'

Here is a man in weakness, lying down there, fallen in to the hands of robbers. That can apply to a sinner and it can apply to somebody who has gone astray too, for Scripture tells us that "all we like sheep have gone astray", Isa 53: 6. Peter tells us that: "For ye were going astray as sheep". It is so easy to get your eye off the Saviour: "For ye were going astray as sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls", 1 Pet 2: 25. Oh, I trust that is true of everyone who hears the word of God tonight. There is the going astray and then there is the question of the return, not to the church, not to the meeting-room, not to anyone exactly, but to "the shepherd and overseer of your souls". These precious souls that He

died to redeem, He lives to nourish and to nurture. Do not let us go astray because the priest's eyes look. What was this man looking for? There was nothing the priest could see. Scripture says, "for they make broad their phylacteries" (Matt 23: 5), parchments of passages of Scripture, I understand, all in a little box and displayed on their arm or forehead where they could be seen – very holy men, very religious, respectable men. I do not wish to be critical at all, but in speaking to an elder of a church I just quoted:

'Thus far by grace preserved
Each moment speeds us on'

and it did not strike a chord in the man's heart. He could not speak a word about the Saviour, and that is without being critical because I am speaking of persons I know, and they are ordained elders who could not tell a soul the way to heaven, the way of salvation, the way to know the Saviour. They just do not know. How sorrowful! How sad! The priest was like that and on he goes.

The Levite: oh, you say, he is the servant; he is the one who will be able to set out things. Well, he does not have too much time, whatever he may have had in his heart, whatever he knew of Scripture, however he may have served, there is just a possibility that he went over and had a look at him. Sometimes you see persons lying on the street and you wonder if it is degradation or if they are ill. It takes courage and sympathy and feelings to contact humanity at its lowest point. The Saviour did that. At its lowest point He touched humanity. What would the Levite say in any case?

What might he think? It is so easy to say, 'the point of departure is the point of recovery' or "whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap", Gal. 6: 7. Oh how these things can be brought out and not a touch of feeling in the man's soul for the person who was helpless and in need of a lift in his soul. It is so easy! Let us take note of persons who need help, that are in a helpless position.

The Samaritan comes. What happened to the man in any case? You say, Why did he go down there and fall amongst the robbers? We need to be careful if we are the Lord's that we do not

fall amongst them because they will certainly rob you, and the longer it goes on you are apart, indeed, from where the blessing is, and the more the enemy will rob you of your joy in the Lord. He will rob you, indeed, of the sense of the joy of salvation. He will get you to question perhaps as to whether you really have a link with the Lord. That is possible too. The enemy will take advantage to strip you of everything so that you feel there is not a person who understands, not a person who can come in to help. But the Samaritan comes on to the scene all the questions answered. This Samaritan had feelings and was not stinted in what he was able to administer: "bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. I think you children would have liked to have seen that Samaritan getting that man up after he had poured in the oil and the wine and getting him on to that beast. It was "his own beast". He put another man on his own beast and was prepared to walk and to take him where he could be cared for.

That is the word I want to leave with each one of us. When the man was taken to the inn the word was, "Take care of him". Let us take care of one another! Let us, indeed, have the eyes of the Lord Jesus that were so effective when He looked at Peter in Pilate's hall. Peter had denied Him but when the Lord looked at Peter, Peter remembered his failure and went out and wept bitterly. But it was the eyes of a Shepherd who was looking at Peter. "Take care of him"! The Lord Jesus has not only died for us but He is living for us. He is taking care of us every day. Some have gone right through their pathway. The Lord has taken one from our midst; who knows who may be next if the Lord does not come? But, in a sense, no one can have any regrets, for that soul whom the Lord has taken was cared for and he will come out in the day to come and love His appearing. He will come out, as it says, in Matthew's gospel, "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me", chap 25: 40. "Take care of him"! May the Lord bless the word to us for His Name's sake.

BARNET

October 1978

Note in Issue No 209:

I have been asked to explain that the preaching in the edition for June 1990 was by Mr. John Gray of Saltcoats – with Christ 20 February 1990 – Ed.

OBSERVANT CHILDREN

By this time of the year there will have been much fresh activity amongst all the wayside creatures and new life given to take the place of creatures that have died. You might see, as Jesus evidently had seen, a family of little, fluffy chickens being gathered under the wings of the mother-bird. Jesus even wept because His people would not come to Him for salvation in the same way. Do not be put to shame by a brood of little chicks! Some travellers, after a forest fire, were surprised to see a brood run out from under a burnt henbird which had endured the heat to protect them. This shows perhaps better than words how the love of Jesus led Him to die so as to save us from judgment.

Scripture shows that God takes a tender interest in the youngest of His creatures. Even a bird's nest with eggs or fledglings was protected under the Law given through Moses. It is also of interest that this followed immediately after the commandment that a woman must not dress as a man, nor a man as a woman. Thus we must learn in detail what is displeasing to God as well as what is pleasing to Him.

Psalms 84 reminds us that a "house" is made for the sparrow, the commonest and perhaps the least valuable of birds. The Lord Jesus said that not even one of these is forgotten before God. The swallow, probably among the most restless of birds, finds "a nest for herself where she layeth her young". It is said that similar birds fly all day and into the night in search of food.

A young animal which became of use to the Lord was the colt, the foal of an ass. Although well cared for, it had been kept tied up to protect it from harm. More important still this means that the colt was just where Jesus could call for it to ride upon in His entry to Jerusalem. Do you not think that it is a great honour to be ready for His use?

J.C.Evershed