

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 224

November 1991

Contents

VALUE

OPPORTUNITY

HOW GOD DEALS WITH MAN

CHILDREN CROWNED

VALUE

James T. Brown

1 Peter 1: 18; Matthew 13: 45,46; Psalm 137: 5,6

These scriptures continue the idea of value which we considered in the reading. One man valued the Lord Jesus at thirty pieces of silver. He said, "What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver him up to you?" and it says, "And they appointed to him thirty pieces of silver", Matt 26: 15. It was a calculated, callous act. Scripture later says, "And I took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was set a price on, whom they who were of the sons of Israel had set a price on ...", Matt 27: 9. Never was there a transaction so misguided, an estimate so undervalued than when cruel, scheming, wicked hands set the value of the Lord of glory at thirty pieces of silver! He had created the silver from which these coins had been formed. Job says, "Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold which they refine", chap 28: 1. The Lord Jesus had established the vein for the silver as the One who had created the worlds. How many worlds there are, who can say, outwith the solar system as we know it? The Lord Jesus created them all. He is the Mediator of creation: "by whom also he made the worlds". What is more He is "established heir of all things", Heb 1: 2. Whatever man could offer to or for Him, He had title to. What wealth that implies! As the "heir of all things", He was competent to take up all things as God's representative and to succeed to every right of God. Yet men valued the Lord of glory at thirty pieces of silver.

Conversely Peter speaks about "precious blood": " ... ye have been redeemed, not by corruptible things, as silver or gold, ... but by precious blood". These were the words of a man whose heart had been touched by the fulness of divine grace and divine mercy and who had an appreciation of the cost to Christ of the cost to God, to bring men into His presence: Silver and gold would never suffice nor "your vain conversation ...", as it says "... handed down from your fathers". The work of redemption owed nothing to convention, or

custom, or ritual. It required the precious blood. I wonder if everyone here is resting on the preciousness of that blood. No other blood would do. The blood of goats or calves could not suffice. Nothing would do but the "precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot". So that we can say, "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood ...", Rom 3: 24,25. "Redemption which is in Christ Jesus" - wonderful thing! It stands there in relation to the whole race of mankind though effective for them only by the exercise of faith. And the basis is the precious blood: "in whom we have redemption through his blood", Eph 1: 7. Precious blood shed by One who alone had the right of redemption. No other had it. That right was established in Christ becoming man and coming in in relation to humanity. He is the true Boaz, the mighty Man of wealth. What a wonderful, precious Person Jesus is! And as cleansed by His precious blood we can enter into the highest purposes of God. What a wonderful presentation we thus have here - "precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot". He has paid the full price - no underestimate there. Remember it says as to Abraham, he "weighed to Ephron the money that he had named in the ears of the sons of Heth - four hundred shekels of silver, current with the merchant", Gen 23: 16. It was the current price He paid, not one iota under-valued, the full price, "current with the merchant", weighed, you might say, speaking reverently, in the just balances of a righteous, sin-hating God.

So we had reference in the reading to the passover lamb. It was taken into the houses and held there between the tenth and fourteenth days. The tenth day - what an event it was when the Lord of glory came into manhood! What a day it was when He left the heights of glory to come into this poor, benighted scene. Mr Darby says:

"How rightly rose the praises
Of heaven that wondrous night –
When shepherds hid their faces
In brightest angel-light!

More just those acclamations,
Than when the glorious band,
Chanted earth's deep foundations, -
Just laid by God's right hand."

He was One, "who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God; but emptied himself, taking a bondman's form, taking his place in the likeness of men; and having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross", Phil 2: 6-8. What a consideration that is. Subsisting in the form of God, He emptied Himself, through love, of all His outward glory, of the form of God, and took the form of a man and when in the form of a man, still humbled Himself. It was a second thing He did in humbling Himself. As God He emptied Himself; as man He humbled Himself. And he took His place in the likeness of man, making no claim to distinction. He did it Himself: no other required it. Oh, are you not freshly enamoured of this glorious Person? Is not your heart freshly attracted to the One who shed His precious blood that guilty sinners like you and me might go free and be brought into the presence of God to enjoy the most exalted thoughts that could ever be vouchsafed to men, according to the richness of divine purposes and counsels? What is the price? The price is the "precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot".

Well, the lamb was taken into the house - and how the household would look upon it these four days, its every gesture and activity - the Lamb of God fully in accordance with the will of God. He was perfect. He was fully obedient, not a step out of place. Pets need training. But the Lord Jesus was intrinsically obedient. Every day was marked by perfect obedience. How wholesome it is to think of these days! (Luke speaks about "one of the days", chap 5: 17). These were days full of goodness, full of blessedness, full of the administration of grace, full of joy for God. He grew up "as a tender sapling, and as a root out of dry ground", Isa 53: 2. Everything around Him was coarse and barren but in relation to Christ the

Father could say, "in thee I have found my delight", Mark 1: 11. Wonderful Person! I wonder, dear young person, if you are finding your delight in the pathway of Jesus? How attractive it is! Read the gospels, the strong meat of the gospels! Think of these four days, no doubt each corresponding in some way with the four gospels: Matthew, portraying Christ as the King, Mark showing Him as the perfect Servant, Luke presenting Him as dispensing the fulness of divine grace, and John, giving us Him as the great source of life for men: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men", John 1: 4.

Yet such a One had to suffer and die. The lamb was "without blemish, a yearling male", Exod 12: 5. There was not a flaw in Jesus! His was a perfect, immaculate humanity, at which no-one could rightly point a finger. Men endeavoured to demean Him, to slight and revile Him, but unaggressive and un-retaliating when reviled, he reviled not again (see 1 Pet 2: 23). How much He suffered at the hands of men on account of righteousness: "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and was as a sheep dumb before her shearers, and he opened not his mouth", Isa 53: 7. Yet He paid the full price. The lamb was kept until the fourteenth day and killed between the two evenings. How affecting to think of Christ our Passover being sacrificed for us. His precious blood was shed and typically placed on the door-posts and on the lintel, providing perfect security and safety for those within the house. "For the redemption of their soul ...", it says, " ... is costly ...", "None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him, (For the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be given up for ever)", Ps 49: 7,8. What a price Jesus has paid that you and I should be brought into the realm of greatest favour! May our hearts be freshly attracted to Him.

Moses in his instruction to the elders adds something which was not given to him directly by commandment from God. His instruction to them was to take the hyssop and dip it in the blood that was in the basin, (see Exod 12: 22). That is an additional thought. It seems to bring out Moses' fresh appreciation of the blood and its exhaustless, abiding efficacy. There is room surely for us all,

especially those of us who are younger, to increase in our appreciation of Him. Remember in Exodus 24, the youths of the children of Israel offered up burnt-offerings and peace offerings: "And Moses took half the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar", v.6. How God delights in the valuation His people put on the blood and their appreciation of the One whose blood it is. Leviticus 16 provides us with another aspect of the precious blood, relating to the sin-offering on the great day of atonement and giving us the deepest meaning of the death of Christ. In other offerings the blood was not carried inside, thus referring more to the bearing of these offerings on the offerer, but in the sin-offering on the great day of atonement the blood was taken in and put on the mercy-seat. It involved its bearing Godward. It was God putting Himself in relation to the universe in righteousness and He has done it in a blessed Man. Everything for God and man was necessarily founded on what took place on the antitype of that great day. The majesty of God had been offended, but He has been vindicated by what Christ has done and by that precious blood! God can come out now to men in perfect righteousness and in fullest blessing. Then the blood was sprinkled in front of the mercyseat. What a thought that is! Propitiation was made, not just for our sins but for the whole world. By virtue of that precious blood, the Lord Jesus will reconcile everything on heaven and on earth, "having made peace by the blood of his cross", Col 1: 20. Everything will be resolved to the entire divine satisfaction by virtue of what Christ has done, by virtue of that precious blood! Then the scapegoat was sent away, the priest confessing the sins of the people over it, never to be recalled. Wonderful work of Christ! The bodies of the bullock and the goat were taken outside the camp and burnt. It was the allconsuming judgment of God against sin, borne by the Saviour, borne by the One who shed His precious blood. Christ as man met God on behalf of men on account of sin and was dealt with as if these sins were His own. What a thing! "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him", 2 Cor 5: 21. Well, may our hearts be freshly attracted to the One who shed His blood at Calvary. Peter speaks about it as

"precious blood". May we increasingly have such an estimate of that blood, so that in our affections we can truly say -

"Precious, precious blood of Jesus,
Shed on Calvary!
Shed for rebels, shed for sinners,
Shed for me." (Hymn 167)

In Matthew's gospel we have the securing of the pearl, and the estimate of the Lord Jesus is that it is a "pearl of great value". It is affecting to think of divine valuation in that way. "... Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it ...", Eph 5: 25. What cost to Christ that the pearl, the assembly, might be secured for Himself! It was in His mind as coming into manhood, the securing of this pearl according to the purposes and counsels of God. "... like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls; and having found one pearl of great value ...". There was the malice, the hatred, the envy that He faced, yet through it all, you might say, He was sustained by the anticipation of the pearl coming into view. He was no ordinary merchant! Remember as to Tyre it says, "... whose merchants were princes, whose dealers were the honourable of the earth ...", Isa 23: 8. But here was One without peer, this great heavenly Merchant, this divine Connoisseur, seeking and finding a pearl of great value that will one day be displayed to a wondering universe. Surely it would instil in us a greater sense of responsibility and revive our affections to think that we belong to a vessel for which Christ gave everything, surrendered all, that we might be part of this glorious answer to His affections. Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders of "the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own", Acts 20: 28. The same blood that laid the basis for our eternal redemption was the currency, you might say, speaking reverently, in which the assembly, this pearl, was purchased. Does that not affect you? Does it stir your affections? Often in the humdrum activity of life the glow and the attraction of Christianity begin to wane. We recede from the grandeur of God's great thoughts for us. What will revive us? The contemplation, surely, that we belong to an entity that cost Christ everything. He relinquished

everything. It says that he went and sold all whatever he had and bought it. Paul in writing to the Corinthians says, "... He, being rich, became poor, in order that ye by *his* poverty might be enriched", 2 Cor 8: 9. The Lord Jesus went through everything in view of the joy lying before Him, " ... endured the cross, having despised the shame ...", Heb 12: 2. Why? That this pearl might be secured for Himself! One day the assembly is going to be presented to Christ without spot or wrinkle. I suppose He will look at the pearl then and say, 'The cost was fully justified.' When the pearl is in His presence without spot, without flaw, without any defect whatsoever, He will say that it was fully up to His valuation! Think of the discerning eyes of a perfect Man looking for an answer to His affections! It says in the Song: "His eyes are like doves by the water-brooks, washed with milk, fitly set", chap 5: 12. How fine to contemplate His eyes looking out, looking for an answer, looking for a response!

The acquisition of this pearl of great value required the surrender of His life in death. Well, surely the realisation that the Lord Jesus regards the pearl as "of great value" and has given His all to secure it would inculcate in us a sense of responsibility and of renewed committal to His interests here. The divine intent is that there should be a moral answer in our hearts and in our lives to such wonderful giving. Corinthians says: "... and ye are not your own? for ye have been bought with a price: glorify now then God in your body", 1 Cor 6: 19,20. "Ye have been bought with a price; do not be the bondmen of men", 1 Cor 7: 23. We are under divine ownership, and divine ownership brings with it a sense of responsibility, to which we need to measure up. We need to love the truth, to value the fellowship, and, as we had in the reading, to "be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord", 2 Tim 1: 8. The great motivating power, the great lever for our affections must surely be the price to Christ, the cost to God, to give us a place among the sanctified, among the redeemed. Romans 12 speaks about presenting our bodies a living sacrifice (v 1). That is a wonderful thing; it is a priestly act, the body offered up sacrificially, never to be recalled. Romans 6 speaks about our members yielded as

instruments of righteousness (v 13). Romans 12 is more than that: it is the whole body committed to the will of God. How testing and challenging that is. In the consecration of the priesthood, the blood of the ram was placed on the thumb, the right ear and the great toe. It is a reminder that the standard of our committal is according to what has been established in redemption by Christ; our entry into priestly service is on the basis of the supreme sacrifice of Christ. Romans 12 speaks about "the compassions of God", (v 12). It appeals to our affections, drawing our attention to the sacrifice of Christ and what it meant to God to bring us to Himself! He is worthy of full committal. So that the meetings become important, the scriptures become important and the brethren go up in our esteem. In these interesting chapters towards the end of Leviticus, there is reference to what is to be valued: "And all thy valuation shall be according to the shekel of the sanctuary", chap 27: 25 - a whole range of transactions to be conducted "according to the shekel of the sanctuary", Our estimate of everything has to be according to what has been established in redemption in Christ. What a challenge that is. In relation to the atonement-money, the rich were not to give more and the poor were not to give less than half a shekel (see Exod 30: 15) after the shekel of the sanctuary. How affecting that is. For every blood-bought saint the price was the same! So it raises in our hearts how we esteem each other, "... the weak one, the brother for whose sake Christ died ..." (1 Cor 8: 11) or the most prominent brother in the meeting. All cost Christ the same, and our own affections and thoughts are to be similarly governed. If that is so, there will be fruit for God. In Exodus 30, when the ransom money is gathered in, it is devoted to the service of the tent of meeting. There is thus a response, productive for God, by virtue of that appreciation of the blood of Christ.

I read from Psalm 137. What an emotive Psalm it is! Outwardly things seem to have reached their lowest point - the once exalted nation in abject captivity, they wept when they remembered Zion, and the sound of the harp was stilled. Maybe individually or householdly or collectively we can go back to brighter days. Maybe

we can point to a time when our enthusiasm for things was greater, our committal was more intense, when our love for Christ and respect for the brethren were deeper and fuller. What is going to revive us? Surely it is the sense of the sovereign mercy of God and the impregnability of his purposes. So that we do not weep when we remember Zion, rather our hearts are freshly enthused as we recall that "His foundation is in the mountains of holiness", and that "Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion more than all the habitations of Jacob", Ps 87: 2. It is the administration of the fulness of divine grace and mercy and it is towards us. How wonderful to trace our origins to Zion: "This one and that one was born in her; and the Most High himself shall establish her", Ps 87: 5. How fine to find our roots in the sovereign mercy of God. Then it goes on to say, "Jehovah will count, when he inscribeth the peoples, This man was born there", v 6. How the divine spotlight delights to focus upon Christ, the One who has accomplished everything for God. "As well the singers as the dancers shall say, All my springs are in thee", v 7. How exhilarating to be finding our springs in Zion, to be deriving our energies and our life from Zion, so that our hearts are given fresh impulse and impetus to be committed to all that God has in mind for His people in testimony here.

So it says, "If I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill". Jerusalem is the great spiritual objective. It is the high point of divine thoughts. It is the uplands, you might say, of Ephesian truth: "If I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill". What a challenge that is. How can we forget Jerusalem? The Psalm says, "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem", Ps 122: 2. Surely words such as these would galvanise us and set us forward with the renewed energy and committal which would befit those who have access to, Jerusalem. Often we fall below the standard, but an appreciation of all that Jerusalem implies would freshly set us forward. "If I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill ...". That is a reference, no doubt, to the harps which were stilled. Surely the exercises through which God passes us in His matchless ways are really to revive our energy for that

divine music which gratifies His affections, and to make the strings of these harps tighter so that there is a more melodious, more tuneful response to all that Christ has done and all that God has expended upon us. Remember in David's day there were those who were instructed in the songs of Jehovah. It says, "all of them skilful", 1 Chron 25: 7. What was the key? They were under the direction of the king. How rewarding to be under the direction of the king, to be subject to His desires and to value things as He does so that these hearts of ours become more tuneful and more melodious in the service Godward.

Well, may these exercises through which we go, grim and serious though they may be, serve to produce a sweeter, harmonious note for the divine ear. Habakkuk, I suppose, sets it out. He represents a believer who has gone through discipline. What does he say at the end of his book? - "And he maketh my feet like hinds' feet, And he will make me to walk upon my high places. To the chief Musician. On my stringed instruments", chap 3: 19. There was a man who had the benefit of all the exercised through which he had been passed, through all the discipline that had come his way.

So the Psalm proceeds: "If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to my palate; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." I suppose as you measure things according to the shekel of the sanctuary; you acquire a different perspective and your sense of values changes. Things that took pre-eminence and dominated your life before now take an inferior position. What dominates your affections is Christ and assembly interests - "if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy". That is very testing and very challenging for every heart here - "if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy". I suppose Moses, as we referred to in the reading, sets it out: "esteeming the reproach of the Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect to the recompense", Heb 11: 26. What recompense flows from going in for divine things! What fulness of joy and blessing! Our hearts become fully satisfied, filled full of the love of God. Paul and Silas set it out in the prison in Philippi. Their circumstances were at their darkest: their feet were

in the stocks and it was midnight. What was the result? "... praising God with singing ..." Acts 16: 25. That was the response of hearts in whom Jerusalem was enshrined, the outflow of hearts who preferred Jerusalem to every other thing. Outwardly, the testimony would appear to be under restriction and restraint, but, as we were reminded in the reading, everything will by and by be accomplished according to every purpose and counsel of God. Everything will be secured in triumph for the divine pleasure. There is every incentive, therefore, for Jerusalem to be elevated in our affections and in our hearts, for Jerusalem to have the chief place, for Christ's interests to dominate.

May these scriptures serve to energise us and inspire fresh committal on all our parts: the preciousness of the blood of the Lord Jesus; the value of the assembly to Christ; and that attitude of mind that would prefer Jerusalem above everything else. For His Name's sake.

LONDON

20 April 1991

OPPORTUNITY

John Strachan

Luke 18: 35-43; 19: 1-10; Mark 14: 3-9

God in His goodness gives men the opportunity of hearing the glad tidings and coming into blessing. Maybe some of us here this evening have had many opportunities of hearing the gospel and obtaining the blessing. Tonight God has given us one more opportunity: there may not be another - I cannot say. We who are believers are expecting the Lord Jesus to come for us. Perhaps, however, any of us, through whatever circumstances, may not have another opportunity of hearing the gospel. But we have one tonight and God wants us to hear. He wants us to receive what He says, He wants us to get the blessing. God is towards men for blessing.

Indeed He wants all men to be saved, without exception! How good God is. He- wants them to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. So God is giving us opportunity. Someone said, "God speaketh once, and twice, - and man perceiveth it not", (Job 3: 14). Maybe, it has passed by our attention that God has spoken in the past, but He would speak to us again. He would speak to us of Christ, because what He has enshrined in the way of blessing for men is in Christ in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Man at the right hand of God, the Man who is living there. Everything that God has in the way of blessing for men is there in that Man, that glorious Man. He is the Man who has accomplished the work of redemption, who went to Calvary's cross and took sins upon Himself, who was made sin and dealt with it to God's glory, to God's satisfaction. Now God can

come out freely and dispense blessing to men. How wonderful that is! The proof of it is that Christ not only suffered and died on Calvary's cross, but that He was raised again and has been exalted to the highest place in heaven. And it is about that glorious Man, that God is having glad tidings proclaimed this evening. What a Person we have to speak about! He has affected the lives of millions and is capable of affecting a change in your life this very day. That is what God is proposing to do.

These scriptures that I have read show how persons took advantage of opportunities that were presented to them. Here was Jesus coming into the neighbourhood of Jericho and it appears that it would be the last time that He would go that way. He was going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die. (Just think of the seriousness of it - if it were your last time of hearing the gospel and you did not take the opportunity that was afforded). This blind man sat by the wayside begging. Oh, he was so near, just there by the wayside. We can be so near to the blessing, so near to where Christ is presented to us as our opportunity. Are we going to miss it? Is anybody here going to miss it? When he heard the crowd passing by he enquired what this might be. They told him that Jesus the Nazaraean was passing by, and he called out saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me;". Those who were going before rebuked him that he might be silent. The crowd will not help you. They rebuked him, they would have been a positive hindrance to his coming to the Saviour. This blind man desperately needed his sight. You may have a desperate need in your soul. Do not let the crowd hinder you. Do not let companionships hinder you from coming to the Saviour. But this man called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me", and Jesus stood still and commanded him to be led to Him. That is the Saviour we present to you. He commanded him to be brought to Him. Oh, the intense interest of the Lord Jesus in this one poor blind man. He was just looking for a little to alleviate his need, but see the grace of the Lord Jesus, as He stood still and had him draw nigh. He said "What wilt thou that I shall do to thee?" Then he said, "Lord, that I may see". The Lord knew that he was blind, He knew that he

needed sight, but He wanted to bring it out from the man himself. It is a wonderful thing to feel that you can tell the Lord Jesus what your need is, You might not feel free to tell anybody else, but you can draw near to Jesus, and you can tell Him what you need. How gracious our Saviour is. He said, "See: thy faith has healed thee" and immediately the man saw.

Now we are presenting this glorious Saviour. There was a time when He walked through the land of Canaan. He walked there, people could see Him, people could get near to Him. Now in our day, He is at the right hand of God and your link with Him must be by faith. You must have faith in this Person. He says, "Thy faith has healed thee", or, as it can read, "Thy faith has saved thee". We are presenting this Person so that you can put your faith in Him: "Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ", (Acts 20: 21) is all that is needed. God is not expecting us to do anything else for our salvation, because we could not do anything else. But we can repent and we can put our faith in this glorious Person. As we put our faith in Him, the wondrous thing is that we come into all the gain of what His work has accomplished. The forgiveness of sins is immediately available. What does a guilty sinner need? He needs the forgiveness of sins and God is ready to dispense that. It does not matter how dark your history has been, God has enough in the work of Christ to cleanse us from every sin; to cleanse you completely, so that your conscience can be entirely free, so that you can face God in the knowledge that you are entirely forgiven - and not only forgiven, but you are justified. You can know that your past, your guilty history, is cleared and cleared forever. You can stand in the presence of God therefore having perfect peace with Him. Oh, things trouble us in our conscience sometimes. Have you ever woken up in the night and wondered about having to meet God, your conscience troubling you because you feel that you are not fit to meet Him? I can tell you that through the work of Christ, God has the answer to every problem that could trouble your conscience. Everything that might trouble a poor guilty sinner can be settled through the work of Christ. He suffered, died, and His

precious blood was shed. "Who himself", Peter says, "bore our sins in his body on the tree", (1 Pet 2: 24). His blood was shed and God has now a righteous basis for forgiving sinners. He can come out and proclaim the gospel to men everywhere. There is never any uncertainty on God's side about the work of Christ. Doubts may arise in our minds, but the answer to all those doubts is that God takes account of the blood. God said, "When I see the blood", (see Exod 12: 13). Since God is satisfied with it, you can be satisfied.

Now the result that came about in this man was that immediately he saw and followed Jesus. He followed Him here in the way He was taking, that of a poor, despised, rejected Saviour. We would like to see persons following Christ. You can follow Him in a way that takes you out of the world. Believers are not intended to find their lives in a world that has rejected Christ. Would you be content with this world after your sins are forgiven? Would you not feel indebted to the One who has suffered and died for you? He has gone out of the world, He has been rejected, and the path for the believer is to follow Him; to follow Him in a way that takes you out of the world. This man not only followed Him, but he glorified God. We have been bought with a price. A believer is intended to view himself in that way, that he has been bought with a price and he is left here in the present time to glorify God in his body. We are to glorify God in the very place where we have been dishonouring to Him. What a triumph the gospel produces. This man took advantage of the opportunity that was presented to him. May everyone here take advantage of the opportunity that is of accepting in faith our Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and following Him in a way that takes you out of this world, glorifying God.

Then it says, "He entered and passed through Jericho. And behold, there was a man by name called Zacchaeus, and he was chief tax-gatherer, and he was rich". Here is a man who had a good deal in this world, but there was an opportunity presented to him that was far greater than anything in the way of riches here. He realised that. God is presenting something to us in the gospel that money cannot buy; presenting a glorious Saviour to us who is far more than

silver or gold; far more than the dearest thing that you could treasure in this world. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus who He was. Do you have any concern to get a view of this glorious, exalted Saviour? Is there any little bit of desire in the soul of someone here to see Jesus, who He is? He is the Son of God; He is the Creator of the universe; He is the Upholder of all things; He upholds everything by the word of His power. How great and glorious He is! Have you ever wanted to get a view of this glorious Person? Here He was, passing by, and Zacchaeus was anxious to get a view of Him. He climbed up into the sycamore tree and, we may say, he was looking down on Jesus. I wonder if that is your position. Are you condescendingly looking down on Jesus? God wants to change that. Jesus looked up and saw him and said to him: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down". He wanted him to be alongside Him. That is God's attitude in grace towards men; God wants to get near to people. You remember the Ethiopian eunuch as he journeyed in his chariot across the desert, and Philip was told: "Approach and join this chariot" (Acts 8: 29); to draw near to him. God's attitude is to get right alongside us; to get to where we are in our relations with Him. I wonder where you are in your relations with God? Then Jesus said, "make haste and come down, for today I must remain in thy house", and Zacchaeus received Him with joy. If we receive the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, it will bring joy into our souls. There is joy connected with the gospel. The gospel is not to make people miserable, or depressed, or discontented, or unhappy; the gospel is intended to bring joy from heaven into the souls of men. That joy is to be known by people who put their faith and trust in our Lord Jesus Christ down here. Zacchaeus said to the Lord: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I return him fourfold". Just think of the grace of it; the Lord Jesus listening to this man! He did not ask for his goods, He wanted the man himself. The Lord wants to secure people themselves. Then He said: "Today, salvation is come to this house, inasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham". The Lord is interested not only in individuals, but in their households. You remember that is how it came to the Philippian jailer after the earthquake. He says:

"What must I do that I may be saved? " and the word was: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved", (Acts 16: 31). That was salvation for him. But then he adds: "And thy house"; salvation for the house. God is great enough for that, not only to save persons, but to save households.

He says: "Inasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham". What does that mean? I think that means that this man had faith. Abraham was the great father of the whole line of faith, and this man had come into the line of faith. So, it is a good thing to lay hold of God in faith, not only for ourselves, but for our households; lay hold of God for our households. And it says: "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost". Oh, how wonderful! The Son of Man come in relation to men, come to seek and to save that which is lost. Think of persons who are lost! Think of men at a distance from God! If you are at a distance from God, God is viewing you for the moment as lost, but the Son of Man is come to seek and to save such as you and such as me. Oh, the distance He would go to seek us and how much He would go through; how much He has gone through, in His precious, holy sufferings, to save us. His attitude is still the same. The opportunity is here for us, not only for ourselves as individuals, but opportunity for our households to come into salvation.

In Mark's gospel, I read of a woman who had a wonderful opportunity, when He was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper; not very salubrious circumstances perhaps, the house of Simon the leper. He had been a leper, but I think he had been cleansed. And there was Jesus in this man's house and this woman takes advantage of the opportunity afforded. She came; she had this alabaster flask of ointment, of pure nard, very costly. I think the implication is that it had cost her a great deal. It cost her a great deal to come and expend her affection on Christ. That is what it means. And having broken the alabaster flask, she poured it out upon His head. She appreciated that everything she had was owed to Him. If we put our trust in Him, let us realise that He has done everything for us. Is He not worthy that we should do everything we

can for Him? He is worthy of our all, without reserve, that we should hold nothing back? Will it cost us something? Let it be so! Let us face the cost and say that we are going to hold nothing back, we are going to have no reserves from committing all we have in affection for this glorious Saviour. So she poured it out upon His head. How worthy He was, how worthy He is, that everything should be expended on Him. They questioned her action, they became indignant, they thought of it as a waste; but He defended her, He said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? she has wrought a good work as to me; for ye have the poor always with you, ... but me ye have not always". If you are prepared to face the cost, and commit yourself in true affection to Christ, I say to you that the Lord Jesus will defend you in the presence of everybody. He will defend you in the presence of the whole world. So do not be afraid, be prepared to face the cost, and commit yourself without reserve to Him as she did. She poured it out, there was nothing held back, and He defended her to the utmost. "What she could, she has done". Oh, what could you do? Could you present your body a living sacrifice? Could you hold your body for the will of God here? Are you prepared for that? We ought to be prepared for that as believers who owe everything to Christ, to yield ourselves without reserve, to hold ourselves for the will of God. So that we no longer want to please ourselves, and do our own will, and go where we want to go, without regard for the claims of Christ. I can say: No, I have changed; I have been converted; I am repentant; I have trusted the Saviour; my life is to be devoted to Him, from this point forward. Are you prepared for that? Is there something that needs to be changed about our lives? We have gone perhaps our own way, pleasing ourselves, and God is appealing. He is giving us an opportunity to change, to turn around, to change course, and where we have been pleasing ourselves, to be here instead pleasing to God.

Another thing that follows from the action of this woman is what the Lord said, "Wheresoever these glad tidings may be preached in the whole world, what this woman has done shalt be also spoken of for a memorial of her". Think of that. God in His grace and His

goodness saying, 'Look, I will show you what is made possible by the glad tidings, I will give you an example'. Oh, this woman is a living, example of what the glad tidings can produce. Someone who did what she could. Now the Lord has asked us to do something which is within the reach of each one of us. He has said: "This do in remembrance of me", (1 Cor 11: 24). True lovers of the Lord Jesus can partake of the Lord's supper in remembrance of Him, according to His own request. That is something we can do. We have the opportunity now; we will not always have the opportunity. When we are in heaven with the Lord Jesus, we shall be with Him; there will be no need to remember Him. But here, where He is absent, where He is rejected, we have the opportunity, of remembering Him, along with others who love Him, and thus affording satisfaction and pleasure for His own heart. May the Lord bless the word.

MELBOURNE

21 April 1991

HOW GOD DEALS WITH MAN

Sandy McKay

Luke 18: 35 - ch.19: 7

This is a very interesting portion of scripture. It is interesting for those of us who have known Jesus as our Saviour for a long time, and for some of us it was of great interest when we were very young. It shows the way in which God deals with man.

I suppose we know that we have to do with God. We cannot go out at night and look up at the stars and not be impressed with the majesty of creation. God created the heavens and the earth, but not only that, He created man - you, me, men and women, boys and girls. Why did He create us? God was sufficient in Himself in one sense; but there is more than that. God's nature, love, desired an answer, and so He created man that He might have an answer for His own heart. Have you ever thought of that? That is why God created you and me, that He might have an answer. Sin came in, and man failed. Sin, lawlessness, had been before in heaven, but it was introduced on to the earth. It was not God's fault. When God created the earth, it was perfect, no flaw, no difficulty, no trouble, everything ran entirely according to God's plan. God created man, and before He created him, He created a garden so that man would have no cause for complaint of any kind, and put man in the very best conditions. I will tell you why He did that - because God knew that the enemy of your soul and mine would whisper into your heart that initially the fault was God's, and blame God. God put man into conditions where there could be no blame attached to God. Man was told to till and to guard that garden, but he fell down in that - he fell down in the guarding anyway - and sin came in. "By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5: 12). We cannot deny that there is every evidence of death around us, and we can go back to the beginning and we see where it came in. But where man failed, God introduced another Man, the Lord Jesus, His only-

begotten Son, another kind of Man: and where man failed, God brought in a Man that did not fail. He was holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. That could not be you or me. God had a standard, and man failed to measure up to that standard, but that standard has been set out in Jesus. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3: 23), but Jesus fully measured up to the standard, and He glorified God. He said, "I have glorified thee on the earth" (John 17: 4). That may seem all very impersonal as far as we are concerned, but when we go to the gospel of Luke in particular, we see how Jesus drew near to people - not only in that gospel but in the other gospels as well - because when He is introduced in Matthew, it is "God with us", "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt 1: 21); alongside of that, " 'God with us'" (v.24).

The writer of this gospel was one like ourselves, he was a Gentile. No doubt, by his name, he was a Greek. He had no claim to salvation; we will not go into that, but he had no claim to salvation. Some may have had a claim; we have no claim. Do you recognise that? No claim. Then why can we preach the gospel? We can preach the gospel because Jesus, the One who was holy, harmless and undefiled, died for us - we who had no right to anything but death and judgment, condemnation. Scripture says, "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor 15: 3). Now, does that include everyone in the room? It must have included the company that Paul was writing to. It certainly should include everyone in the room, "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and ... he was buried; and ... he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures". Most of us know that when Jesus died, He died on a cross, the most shameful and painful death that man could devise: that is what they chose for Jesus. If you had been there, would you have given your vote for that? Would you, if you had been given the choice - "this Man or Barabbas" - Jesus, the spotless, sinless One, or Barabbas, whom scripture tells us was a murderer - for whom would you have given your vote? The test is, for whom are you giving your vote tonight? It is very simple. Would you have been like the gospel writer who said

when he saw the three men - Jesus and two malefactors crucified - "one on this side and one on that and Jesus in the middle" John 19: 18. Which side would you have been on? Would you have been on this side - or would you have been on that side? It is testing; it affects our life here for the rest of our time, and it is vital in view of where we will spend eternity. When Jesus died, as we have said, He died for sins, but when He went into death, He annulled death. That word 'annulled' means blotted out; it is a legal term and it means that whatever was on that part of the document was blotted out. (In effect it means that it makes it as though it had never been.) Now, as far as you are concerned, if you put your trust in Jesus, you can say, 'Christ died for my sins'. Anyone can say that - put your trust in Jesus and you can say, 'Christ died for our sins', that means that you are on this side, you are on the side of the crucified Jesus. But then as we have already said, not only did He die for our sins, but He was buried. Man of the order of which we are by nature had been an affront to God. We need to understand that. Whatever we may have been according to nature - born in a palace or wherever it may be - we were an affront to God on account of the way we had responded to Him. In spite of all His goodness, His wonderful provision, what was the reaction? We ignored God: not only that, we were rebels. But when Jesus hung on the tree, He died for sinners and He died for rebels. If you have resisted God up to this point, now is the opportunity to acknowledge the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and accept Him as your Substitute - that Jesus died for you.

We read here of a blind man. We do not know much about this man's blindness, but alas there are many blind people today. Do you think that God is interested in you? I can tell you that God is interested in you. He wants to have your heart - "My son, give me thy heart" (Prov 23: 26). He wants your heart; He wants your affections. Satan wanted to deny that to God at the outset. When He came in to the garden Adam was lost, he hid himself. There is no need for you to be lost; there is a way back. Grace reigns through righteousness, so God has established for you a righteous claim to have your sins forgiven, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son

cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1: 7). He died, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3: 18), He, the just One, the sinless One, died for us who were sinners the unjust ones, to bring us to God. This man was blind. Jesus opened his eyes. The same Jesus is ready to open the eyes of everyone in this room. If you have never seen Jesus as a Saviour before, God would open your eyes in order that you might see Him as a Saviour for you, a personal Saviour. This blind man was sitting begging. It had been his daily occupation, and we are told his name. He enquired what was going on. There is a commotion going on. What is going on? There was a crowd. Crowds are not always sympathetic, but I can assure you, anyone in this room who has never had to do with Jesus that this is a very sympathetic atmosphere. There is no-one here who would be unsympathetic. If you had any questions, there would be someone who would be only too glad to seek to answer them. That is the great principle of the glad tidings preached in places where there is sympathy. Persons are ready who have a heart, who have been touched by Jesus and want to bring others in to be responsive. And so it says, "And he called out saying, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me", have mercy! The God with whom we have to do is a God who is rich in mercy. There is an ample supply of mercy. Myriads have been secured and will be for God's glory eternally, happily and restfully now enjoying Him as a Saviour God because they have come under this wonderful touch of the One who was rich in mercy. Then, God has established His rights in mercy, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined forth" (Psalm 50: 2). That may seem a strange reference if you do not understand it, but Zion means God's rights in mercy. God has come out to establish a right to have you for His pleasure. And so he says, "Have mercy on me". They say, 'Be quiet; it is not the time'. That is what the enemy would do - 'it is not the time, not the place'. Do not be quietened. Jesus has started to work with you. The Spirit of God has caused a certain seeking in your heart, a seeking after God and that is an evidence of the Spirit's work. You may not understand it but you will when you give your heart to Jesus. So today we can say, 'Whosoever will may come'.

Now, Jesus stood still. That is one of the most touching statements in scripture, "Jesus stood still". Where was Jesus going? He was going on to Jerusalem. That is where He should have been acclaimed as the King. Would you acclaim Him as your King? (We have to make it personal.) They did not acclaim Him as their King, they crucified Him, put Him on the cross, and yet there was a notice put on the cross, His accusation was that He was King of the Jews. That same Jesus is coming to take up His rights. Alas then, there will not be gospel preachings as we know them. "Behold, now is the well-accepted time; behold, now the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6: 2). Bartimaeus may never have had another opportunity to come face to face with Jesus. This may be the last opportunity that you will have to accept Jesus as your Saviour because we are looking for Him to come and take up His rights. Jesus is coming soon. When He comes He will call all His own, every one. What a great matter, a wonderful thing for those that love Jesus to anticipate that day! And then, what we anticipate is that when He comes in glory He will be vindicated, the One who was crucified is the One who will come and He will be acknowledged as King of kings and Lord of those that exercise lordship.

If you give Him that place in your heart, you are really doing privately what will be done publicly in a day to come. And so "Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be led to him". Jesus would have those in sympathy with Him. We would like to be able to lead persons to Jesus. The next thing is that He says, "What wilt thou that I shall do to thee? And he said, Lord ...", "Lord". Now, the scripture says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from among the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart is believed to righteousness; and with the mouth confession made to salvation" (Romans 10: 9,10). It is very simple, "For with the heart is believed to righteousness", that is, we can now be counted righteous before God because the blood of Jesus has met the claims of God's throne, the blood of Jesus He has accounted our righteousness, and then we know what it is to come into the gain of salvation, "For with the

heart is believed to righteousness; and with the mouth confession made to salvation". Simply confess Jesus as Lord and what you will find is joy flooding into your heart, a heart that has been hitherto unresponsive is now buoyant with praise and worship. Then it says, "See thy faith has healed thee". You can well understand a man who had been blind, the first thing would be that he might see, but we want to apply it morally. Have you never seen beauty in Jesus? Have you never seen Him as your Saviour? Simply ask Jesus that you might see it tonight and it will be granted. The eyes of your heart will be opened to see beauty in Jesus and see Him as the Saviour, your Saviour. And then there will be rejoicing.

The next man is a man who has a certain knowledge of Jesus. He did not need to know who was passing by, he knew about Jesus, but he wanted to know a little more, so you can see that things are put in consecutively. We are not intended to stay initially simply with knowing Jesus as our Saviour, although that is a great matter, and as we confess Jesus as Lord, that means we are fit for heaven; but then this man wanted to know a little more. He wanted "to see Jesus who he was". That goes deeper than recognising Him as a Man here, although He was that, He was more than that. Who was He? He was God. We want to see that we are brought to Jesus - initially it is a great thing to get a hold of, - but then that is only the beginning. He wanted to see Jesus, and he had to climb up that tree, but when Jesus came, He stopped again, "Make haste and come down".

That is something we all have to come to, that if we do not come down, Jesus will have to bring us down. Whatever thoughts he had of himself had to go because Jesus wanted this man, Jesus wanted him. What did He want him for? He wanted him for His service. Remember the incident when He sent for the colt, "the Lord has need of it"; well, Jesus needs each one, boys, girls, men, women - even though they are old He still wants them. He says, "Make haste and come down, for today I must remain in thy house". Zacchaeus had a house: Jesus wanted that house. Part of the glad tidings is, that when God gets a bit of your heart, He wants your

whole heart; when God gets a bit of your house, He wants your whole house. God completes things. We read in Genesis, on the very first page of the Scriptures, of God finishing things, and seeing that it was good. When Jesus does a thing He finishes it, and it is good. So Jesus wants you. Why does He want you? He wants you for His service, He wants you for His praise and glory. And so He says to this man, "Make haste and come down, for today I must remain in thy house". This is "today" again. Why does He say, "today"? Because there may not be another day. He is sending out an invitation initially for us to come into the enjoyment of salvation, but He is also sending out an invitation for us to be found here for His service. What does He want us for? To do some great thing in the world? Oh no, not great as far as the world is concerned, but what a wonderful thing to be here in the scene where Jesus has been rejected, to be walking here pleasing to Him, and to be for His praise and glory. We were speaking this afternoon about a man who was lame in his feet and who would have been of little account - his name is Mephibosheth - for company but David had captivated his heart, so he had no eyes for the usurper, he had no eyes for the pleasantries of Jerusalem when David was absent; he was alone in Jerusalem (as far as he knew) and he did not want to fit into its social system or its commercial system or anything else. Now, that is what Jesus wants us for that we may be apart for Him so that we might be for His praise and glory. May it be so for His Name's sake.

EDINBURGH

20 January 1991

CHILDREN CROWNED

It is not an unknown thing for a child to wear a crown or its equivalent. English history tells us that one of the kings of many centuries ago was, at the age of nine, crowned with his mother's bracelet; the real crown had been lost in the sea. As to biblical history, Josiah, one of the kings of Judah was only eight years old when called to the throne. For many years this king "did what was right in the eyes of Jehovah". Before this there was a young king, Manasseh by name, who was crowned at the age of twelve. Sad to say, he had a long reign of wickedness.

It is a happy thing to remember that Jesus was born a king although He had no royal crown. When He died He was crowned in derision with a crown of thorns. These thorns are thought to have been from a plant having pliable stems with thorns and also leaves like ivy. An old word for a crown is the same as the name of Stephen. What an overcomer he was! To his Lord and Master he was faithful unto death and has a martyr's crown.

The epistle of James refers to a crown of *life* to be received by all who resist temptation by keeping a good conscience. Peter's expectation was a crown of *glory*, to be given to him by the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. The saints who form the flock of God need to be cared for in various ways; the youngest believer can have part in this. Even a "cup of cold water" given as refreshment will find its true reward. Paul wrote of his hope of a crown of *righteousness*. It was laid up for him and will be displayed when the Lord Jesus will appear again. All who love Him and look for Him to come will receive such a crown. Will you be amongst them?

J.C.Evershed