

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 228

March 1992

Contents

THE PRACTICE OF THE TRUTH (1)

A VOICE

BAPTISED CHILDREN

THE PRACTICE OF THE TRUTH (1)

Philippians 1: 1-18; 1 John 1: 1-10; 2 Chronicles 35: 17,18

B.M.D. What is suggested is that we might enquire into the practice of the truth. Both the epistle to the Philippians and the epistle of John bear very much on the practical side, the experimental side, more than the doctrinal side. John fully supports Paul's ministry, is complementary to it, so we arrive at what is presented in Paul's glad tidings as the vitality of life. I suggest, dear brethren, that, unless we arrive at things in the vitality of life, the truth may just become a dead letter and maybe we would be better not to have the letter if we hold it apart from the energy and power of the Spirit. Reference to the practice of the truth comes in verse 6 of this first chapter of John (maybe somewhat negatively, referring to those who do not practise the truth) the inference being that John is writing to those who would be concerned to be here in the practice of the truth.

The Philippian epistle is really like a love letter - I think it has been described as the Christian's book of Psalms - and is full of expressions of affection, written by Paul in prison with a chain about him. John writes from, I suppose, Patmos similarly restricted. That bears very much on the public side, and yet in the spiritual realm the whole scope of the truth is opened up to us and is practised.

I thought in this reading we could think of Paul being set for "the defence of the glad tidings". A few other matters could come into the enquiry, especially the way he refers to their "fellowship with the gospel", and then, before that, how he presents himself to these Philippian saints as very deeply and affectionately attached to them. I think the Lord would help us to enquire dependently and simply.

(There is a little unrecorded here).

A.P.D. Why does he present himself as a bondman here?

B.M.D. It points to the unofficial way in which he is writing to these beloved Christians. He does not present himself as an apostle, as he could have, and as he does to Corinth where there was more

adjustment and authority needed. Here he is presented simply as a bondman. Of course, a bondman is a lover because he learned it from his Master. I think that, in the days in which we are, the Lord is leading us away from the official side of things to the mutuality of love among the brethren, and to the benefit of family conditions which maybe we will come to later in this epistle; and John would support that line.

A.P.D. In Deuteronomy 15 it says, "And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee - because he loveth thee and thy house, because he is well with thee, - then thou shalt take an awl" (v 16). I thought that brought out the way of bondmanship because of affection.

B.M.D. I think so, linking the "overseers and ministers"; that might appear more official, but it need not. Every meeting needs such to supply simple care, love's care for one another

Ques. Is it interesting that he links Timothy with him in this later on in the epistle? He says as to Timothy that he had "no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on", chap 2: 20.

B.M.D. That is very fine; so he does not link Silvanus with him here, who was with him in Philippi; it is Timothy. Both of them set out the idea of models.

W.A.M. So it is really the working out of headship, Paul's influence. How do you want to influence the saints? Not officially. The Hebrew bondman was to be taken before the judges. It would affect the whole judicial system in Israel.

B.M.D. Paul is expressing that spirit though he is limited; he is chained, he is in prison. He feels it, does he not? "Except these bonds", he says, Acts 26: 29. Yet his heart is going out towards his beloved brethren to whom he is so deeply and affectionately attached.

W.A.M. Christ was being magnified in his body whether by life or by death - (see Phil 1: 20).

B.M.D. Exactly.

H.G.H. Behind this thought of practice, do we see in verse 3 - "I thank my God for my whole remembrance of you" - that he was thinking of God and God's sovereignty, God's work?

B.M.D. That is what he found at Philippi. It is a striking thing that it does not seem that a judaizing element entered into the work at Philippi. He linked on to the women praying at the river: there is no allusion to a synagogue. And then the preaching was in the prison: what a fine chapel that would have been! You do not forget the ten-word gospel, do you? - or was it fourteen words?

H.G.H. I have not counted them.

B.M.D. I think it was fourteen words: "Thou and thy house" (Acts 16: 31) adds another four. You would never forget a gospel like that, would you?

H.G.H. Who of us has forgotten our first gospel? We all remember our first gospel, do we not?

B.M.D. Well, we should remember; and we have our link with the Saviour. I think we want to have that in mind in our enquiry. In this epistle to the Philippians there is no allusion to sin or to the blood, only inferentially, but John's epistle is full of it. I think the testimony of the glad tidings was effective in these Philippian brethren. The link with the blood would lead us to see how the truth of the passover is to be maintained in days of recovery.

Ques. Could you say more about "the defence of the glad tidings", particularly in Philippi? It suggests that they had won this wonderful ground. How were they maintained in that?

B.M.D. He would have been alive to the elements coming in to damage the work. He brings in warnings later in the epistle: "they are the enemies of the cross of Christ", chap 3: 18. Paul is not unaware of the dangers of the way.

Rem. Maybe there was an element of earthly-mindedness that was very dangerous.

B.M.D. Probably one of the greatest dangers of the present time is materialism.

W.A.M. That involves the displacement of the blessed God: "whose god is the belly", chap 3: 19. That is natural feelings that have ourselves and our own tastes in mind, and God is not in them.

B.M.D. Self-gratification. The work in Philippi gave character to the way the testimony spread in the west, and it still does. In a sense it is maintaining that character; it has gone right out to America and even the Antipodes. We have to work out the truth in days of smallness and fragile conditions, but we can keep to the pattern of what is normal.

WM. So he has the full idea here in referring to "Jesus Christ's day".

B.M.D. Yes, he is looking on to that, which would be over against man's day. How we long for the coming in of Jesus Christ's day!

Ques. There is a certain devotedness which would be found with us, as he says, "I am set for the defence of the glad tidings". Is the whole bent of his life that he is set? You are speaking of the testimony coming westward to us: being characterised by this kind of thing would require devotedness to the truth in our own local settings, do you think?

B.M.D. His whole life was bound up with his glad tidings: "my glad tidings", he says.

A.P.D. Would you be free to say what you think "my glad tidings" involve?

B.M.D. I believe the whole scope of the revealed truth is encased in Paul's glad tidings. What could you exclude? Many go as far as relief and you are very thankful when someone gets their sins forgiven, but Paul's glad tidings involve the whole scope of the revealed truth. That is why he added the four words to the ten: "thou and thy house". What a gospel that was!

Ques. Would Paul's glad tidings take you all the way home? It is "the glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God", 1 Tim 1: 11. It is the glad tidings involving the land.

B.M.D. Surely, and they would take us all the way to heaven and would set us up in practical salvation here below. We want to get to that: eternal life is enjoyed here by faith on the other side of death.

A.P.D. Do the glad tidings involve the greatest service? It is not an inferior service; it is a great service, and we should be in it fully. I was thinking of the value of it, not only for sinners, but for the saints.

B.M.D. I think there is no greater service than the service of preaching the gospel. Maybe we need to be revived to keep it on its proper level. We need food; we need these meetings for enquiry; but the preaching of the Son of God is brought in to bring out the fulness of the glad tidings of God concerning His Son.

A.P.D. Does he have that in mind in verse 10, that they might come into greater understanding and knowledge of "the things that are more excellent"?

B.M.D. That is his prayer, which brings out the heart of the apostle when he prays that their "love may abound yet more and more". It was there, but it could improve. And then what you quote: "that ye may judge of and approve the, things that are more excellent". What do you think that would include?

A.P.D. I wondered if that would include the whole scope of the truth that you have spoken of.

B.M.D. I believe so.

A.P.D. Many Christians fall short of the great scope of things that are "more excellent".

B.M.D. "In full knowledge and all intelligence" runs along with their love being more and more, that it is to be marked by knowledge and intelligence. We need to be intelligent as to the present position of the testimony. We need to know where we are at the present moment.

Rem. Love is a vital matter in this. You were speaking about the practical working out of things. The danger is to take things on in the way of knowledge and intelligence and perhaps lack the love that underlies the matter inwardly.

B.M.D. You know what he says to the Corinthians as to that: if you have not love you are nothing (see 1 Cor 13: 3). That is pretty strong but very true. Love is formation in the divine nature and how can the practice of the truth be experienced without it?

W.A.M. So that the greatest things are possible in our day. There was no such passover as was held in Josiah's day, and later the feast of tabernacles that had not been held since Samuel's day. The greatest things are possible in our day when we bring in the Spirit.

B.M.D. I think we can say that, that God reaches His greatest thoughts on the basis of recovery. Here we are to-day, each of us through the grace of God recovered. Are we not recovered persons through the gospel?

T.E.D. Is part of the practice the dependent movement of the bondman? I am thinking of the way Paul came to Philippi and his dependence, the Holy Spirit forbidding them, but then concluding that the Lord had directed them. Dependence on the Lord for our movements in the testimony is a needful thing at the present time.

B.M.D. And the sensitivity that the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. How close he was to his Master! How close we need to be to the Lord, cleaving to the Lord. So he moves sensitively, and the word is "Pass over ... and help us", Acts 16: 9.

W.A.M. It speaks of their "fellowship with the gospel, from the first day until now". I suppose it commenced with Lydia whose heart was opened to hear the word. She embraced the glad tidings.

B.M.D. "Whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul", Acts 16: 14. And then she says, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house", as if to say, You can put me to the test. She wanted to be in the practice of the truth. So when Paul was let go he went to Lydia.

W.A.M. Would that help their fellowship with the glad tidings to continue? I suppose it was continued in the jailor.

B.M.D. No doubt it would be, and that is a test to us. Are we continuing in the preaching of the glad tidings? There is nothing

more important than that the preaching should not lapse.

Ques. In verse 14 it speaks of the brethren speaking the word of God fearlessly: it means there was opposition. Would that come into our day?

B.M.D. I think it does; so you go out with the gospel fearlessly. What is there to fear? I believe we need to be freshly imbued with the glory and greatness of the gospel. Paul immediately preached the Son of God.

Rem. Maybe you could help more as to what you have in mind about maintaining the gospel.

B.M.D. It would be love for souls, and we reflect God's feelings towards all men. Love must find some expression. "God commends his love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us", Rom 5: 8. That is a commendation of His love. Should that not be reflected?

Rem. That is a good exercise in the prayer meeting too, that we might have more love for souls. We need to pray for that.

B.M.D. In the prison Paul and Silas came out from the presence of God. The service of God as proceeding there. They came out freshly imbued with the feelings of God, and they were ready. "What must I do that I may be saved?", Acts 16: 30. I think we could take a pattern from that preaching; "Believe on the Lord Jesus" there was an assembly touch about it - "and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house".

H.G.H. Paul's prayer was "that your love may abound yet more and more".

B.M.D. It is a circle of affection among the brethren that the Lord will add to. What can He add to? It is a test to be where there is love among ourselves: "By this shall all know that ye are disciples of mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves, John 13: 35. There is probably no greater testimony than to have love among ourselves.

A.P.D. The word in John's gospel is "Come and see", not 'Go and see', as if there is something to see. At Philippi you would see

something, you would see love operating, do you think?

B.M.D. What did they see? What did they see in John 1 when 'they abode with him that day' (v 39)?

Rem. The jailor saw two men who were in salvation, so he says, "Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?", Acts 16: 30. There was a demonstration in those men that was superior to their circumstances.

B.M.D. He was attracted by what he saw in those two men. What did he see in them? What is it that attracts us? Another Man.

Ques. Would the type of Christ in the red heifer in Numbers 19 help us on this line of affection? If I think of the way He went into death I would have those feelings myself.

B.M.D. Just so. Those ashes were to be carried out, were they not?

Rem. Paul counts all things loss in Philippians. He cast it all into the burning, did he not?

B.M.D. The red heifer is a very affecting type of our Saviour's death.

Rem. God has to come into the thing as He did with Paul in verse 12: "But I would have you know, brethren, that the circumstances in which I am have turned out rather to the furtherance of the glad tidings". God was behind those circumstances. He is behind the scenes and He moves the scenes that He is behind, so we want to take advantage of the circumstances in which we might be, in dependence upon Him, that we too might be furthered in presenting the glad tidings.

B.M.D. Paul was an overcomer in the circumstances, was he not? He did not know whether he could ever visit them again and he was writing to them, pouring out his heart in this love letter as an overcomer in his circumstances. Now that is how the testimony is to be continued on the principle of the overcomer.

W.A.M. Why do you think the Philippian jailor did not ask for the forgiveness of sins? Why was it salvation that was before him? That is what Paul had in mind in this epistle...: .. salvation.

B.M.D. Surely, "thou and thy house", the man and his house.

W.A.M. That is the sphere of salvation.

B.M.D. Exactly, and that would lead into the local assembly in Philippi.

H.G.H. But as remarked, the Philippian jailor saw salvation in Paul and Silas.

B.M.D. He saw the practice of the gospel in these two men.

W.A.M. It did not matter how the enemy attacked, whether it was by a spirit of Python or in violence, they were superior to it.

B.M.D. Exactly. That is very fine. Paul was able to meet the situation and, in spite of his limited conditions, he was an overcomer.

W.M. Some of us would not have detected the way that the enemy was attacking through the spirit of Python pretending to embrace the truth.

B.M.D. We are not ignorant of his thoughts. We know the enemy is against any representation of Christ in this way and what the glad tidings are leading into - the assembly.

Ques. Do you think when it says, "be always prepared to give an answer to every one that asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3: 15), is that the hope of the glad tidings?

B.M.D. That certainly would be included. As we said, everything is encased in Paul's glad tidings. So the hope would be shining in the way you present things. Do you not think it would in the way Paul spoke the word of the Lord to the jailor and his house? He must have spoken to him about baptism. That would get him out of the world, bringing him into the sphere of practical salvation. Then love begins to operate in the converted jailor. How tenderly he would have washed those stripes!

Rem. Paul seems to suggest he would be speaking of another object. Our hope is centred in heaven where the Lord is, and people would see that you have forgiveness of their sins in mind but you have more. They would wonder what your life centres around and

what is the object of it, and hope would speak of the Lord in heaven. So it is more than the forgiveness of sins that is our object. Hope would bring the Lord into view.

B.M.D. I am sure what you are saying is right. So the preacher in Ecclesiastes is 'a former of assemblies ' (see note to chapter 1: 1). Paul would always have that in mind.

Rem. It is a wonderful privilege to speak of the greatest thoughts of God in the glad tidings, in spite of our limited conditions. They are all open to us, and He would have us in them. We do indeed thank God for the basic features of the glad tidings - we could not be where we are without them, and they have their own wonderful glory that will go into eternity yet God would have His own heart satisfied. So we can understand how the glad tidings really flows out of the Supper.

B.M.D. God loves to hear about His Son. It is the glad tidings of God concerning His Son. In some sense the salvation of the sinner is incidental. Is that a bit severe? We want to see that the glad tidings have their own peculiar glory and that is what Paul is set for the defence of, and we are to have fellowship with him; the saints are brought into having fellowship with him in the gospel.

H.G.H. So, in John's epistle, would the "word of life" (chap 1: 1) embrace the thought of the glad tidings? "That which ... we have seen with our eyes; that which we contemplated, and our hands handled, concerning the word of life" really embraces the glad tidings, does it not?

B.M.D. John had to do with the Lord in the days of His flesh. Paul did not know Christ according to flesh; he had to do with the Lord directly from glory as He appeared to him. John brings in the other side, what the Lord expressed here in the days of His flesh. As he says here: "which we have seen with our eyes; that which we contemplated, and our hands handled". Now, that is the Man of the gospels. We need to feed and dwell upon the way the Lord was expressed in the four gospels. In a way that was the "lamb without blemish and without spot", 1 Pet 1: 19.

W.A.M. It is wonderful how close God came to the apostles. Paul spoke of those "who were apostles before me" (Gal 1: 17) as though he credited them with their relations with the Lord Jesus, and the Father and the Spirit. How wonderful that was! It was their fellowship, the apostles' fellowship, but it is in view of us.

B.M.D. So he had a deep respect for the twelve, did he not? He went up to Jerusalem to make acquaintance with Peter. He respected Peter. How important it is that that mutuality of love should be maintained!

W.A.M. And then Peter, in his second epistle, shows that he respected Paul: "our beloved brother Paul", chap 3: 15.

B.M.D. Yes, even though he had withstood him to the face. You might have to do that: you might have to do that to me. The brotherly bond would take the strain. I think Peter loved him all the more, and he puts his epistles on the basis of Scripture.

Ques. Why does Paul use the word 'defence': "the defence of the glad tidings"?

B.M.D. I suppose because it is always under attack. He is "set for the defence of the glad tidings"; he is not giving any ground whatever.

Rem. It says about that that "ye are all participators in my grace". What is involved in that? The Philippians must have been involved very deeply in relation to the defence of the glad tidings.

B.M.D. I suppose they would be catching on to Paul's spirit in the whole matter.

Rem. I was thinking of what the jailor did that night. It was the complete opposite to what he had been doing. In a sense he began to defend the glad tidings.

B.M.D. You mean in his care for the apostles? I think that is right. It showed that he was coming into the value and joy of salvation.

Rem. Do you think the enemy is against the celebration of the glad tidings particularly? When there is a celebration in Scripture, you

often find that the enemy comes out - as at the weaning of Isaac, there was a celebration and the enemy attacked through Ishmael; in John 12 the enemy attacked; and then in Luke 15 the elder son was critical. Is the enemy against that side of the saints celebrating the glad tidings?

B.M.D. Therefore the need to be "set for the defence of the glad tidings".

T.E.D. So it is "the defence and confirmation of the glad tidings". There must be something in that too, confirmation in your own soul of what the Lord gives you.

B.M.D. You preach in the open-air in Plainfield, do you not? I think it does us good. You might not see much result, but proclaim the word.

T.E.D. The confirmation is what you have in your own soul.

B.M.D. You might not be able to count it by outward results; God knows what they are, but the confirmation comes within your own experience.

Ques. You were speaking of this epistle linking with the Psalms.

B.M.D. It has been described as the Christian's book of Psalms. That could bear thinking upon. This is certainly Paul's psalm; it is a love letter.

E.F.C. As to urgency in connection with preaching the word, Paul says, "for it is woe to me if I should not announce the glad tidings", 1 Cor 9: 16. He seemed to feel that he was under a definite command. He could not do otherwise.

B.M.D. Well, you have found the confirmation in your own town of Los Angeles.

E.F.C. I have heard it on the streets of Motueka too.

B.M.D. Preach the word! Proclaim the word!

E.F.C. Were you thinking not only of preaching in the open air but in the rooms and then in personal contact with souls?

B.M.D. Most of all, I think, the skill of personal contact. Try and speak to someone every day if you can. That requires skill and love for souls.

Ques. Does the "defence of the glad tidings" mean not only preaching the glad tidings but also maintaining the truth that is involved? Is that what is involved in "the defence", that Paul was seeking to maintain the full thought of the gospel, allowing nothing to corrupt it or to alter it?

B.M.D. In Corinth they were preaching another gospel. Think how Paul would react to that - another gospel? Another Jesus? You can see how he would rise to the defence of the glad tidings. All sorts of things are being preached in the world. There is only one glad tidings, concerning the Son of God. Just to touch again on the epistle of John, it shows the importance of being occupied in the gospels; our fellowship is with the apostles. John makes much of "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin". That reminds us of the passover, the blood of the sheltering from judgment of the passover lamb. Do we ever leave that behind? Why was it neglected in the days of Samuel where we read in Chronicles?

Ques. Are you pointing out two fellowships, speaking about our fellowship: "that ye also may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is indeed with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ"?

B.M.D. Oh, no, there is one fellowship; we come into the fellowship of the apostles. They had a fellowship peculiarly; they had to do with the Lord in the days of His flesh, but you and I have not that. Paul had not that. So we come into the fellowship of the apostles. There is only one fellowship, the fellowship of God's Son; we are "called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord", 1 Cor 1: 9.

A.P.D. Is this reference to "That which was from the beginning" intended to bring a certain stability into our souls?

B.M.D. It would allude to the incarnation. It is not the beginning as in John's gospel. This would allude to the Lord becoming Man. The wonder of the universe is the incarnation.

W.A.M. What comes in with Him! Simeon spoke of the things that He brought in: "for mine eyes have seen thy salvation", Luke 2: 30.

B.M.D. He took Him into his arms. We have to see that the gospel involves a Person. Christianity is that Person. Christianity is not a carry over from Judaism at all. It is something absolutely and entirely new.

E.F.C. So we are to persevere "in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers", Acts 2: 42. Would that link on with John's account in his first epistle? That is the fellowship you and I are linked with.

B.M.D. Exactly. It is the safe ground we can take.

T.E.D. The Lord says in Matthew, "It is sufficient for the disciple that he should become as his teacher, and the bondman as his lord", chap 10: 25. Would that be seen in these men, Paul and John, this side of fellowship? But then what comes out in them is the expression of Christ. Is that not a current exercise that the Lord would raise with us, to be more in the expression of Christ Himself?

B.M.D. Paul says, "Be my imitators", but then quickly adds, "even as I also am of Christ", 1 Cor 11: 1. Paul never drew a party or a sect round himself, and yet he was a model; and in some sense the effectiveness of a preacher is what he expresses himself. If I am not in the practice of it, how can my preaching be effective? You practise what you preach, we used to say. You see it exemplified in this beloved apostle Paul and in John.

T.E.D. Like what beloved Mr Percy Lyon said of Paul: he was the exponent of what he propounded.

J.P. Would you say a little about what the gospel of the glory means?

B.M.D. The gospel of the glory would show the fulness of what Paul was presenting. He would not stop short of the glory, "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ", 2 Cor 4: 6. That would be a very full gospel. The glory of God is His outshining in love for sinners like you and I have been. He has lifted us out of all the degradation

involved in our sinnership to the glory of the presence of the One who is there, for Forerunner for us.

J.P. "His visage was so marred more than any man", Isa 52: 14. It is the same face in which the glory of God shines.

B.M.D. We shall see that face up there, radiant in glory. It will not be marred there. I do not think His body of glory will show the marks of those sufferings. Would it be safe to say that?

Ques. Would it be going too far to link this word here in verse 1, where he speaks not only of what we have seen and contemplated but also of what "our hands handled", with the passover lamb? I notice you were linking the thought of "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin" with the passover. I was thinking of the lamb being in the house.

B.M.D. That is exactly what I was thinking. "Handled" - how tenderly that lamb would come into the affections of everyone in the household; so we need to feed constantly on the Man of the gospels.

W.A.M. So Christianity is a substantial matter. It is not just a matter of doctrine. Their hands had handled Him: He was not a spirit; He was a real Man.

B.M.D. That is right; so they could give an account of things at first-hand. They had heard His voice; they had had to do with Him in the days of His flesh; but we have not. We come into the fellowship of those who have, but Paul received what he had direct from glory.

W.A.M. But what is substantial is carried through.

B.M.D. Exactly. So that would bring us to this remarkable passover in 2 Chronicles where it is linked with the feast of unleavened bread seven days. It is striking how the passover is prominent in the four gospels. We come into the great antitype of it all at the cross.

A.P.D. Paul would seem to suggest that it underlies right assembly conditions: "our passover, Christ, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5: 7), as if it underlies happy, normal, assembly conditions.

B.M.D. It is striking how he brings it in in that chapter where he is dealing with evil, as if there had been a neglect of the feeding on the passover lamb and, more than that, the feast of unleavened bread.

We cannot deal with evil if we do not understand the feast of unleavened bread. It reduces. There is no room for the flesh if we understand the feast of unleavened bread, and that extended for seven days.

A.P.D. Is that why Paul brought it in currently and why it would be brought in currently among us to maintain these conditions of self-judgment in which God is pleased to dwell and make Himself known.

B.M.D. I think what you are quoting is salutary, coming from that epistle, because they were puffed up; that was no condition to deal with evil. We do need, I think, to maintain in practice the feast of unleavened bread. There is no place for the flesh in the things of God; but then occupation with the moral perfection of the Lord Jesus in the spotlessness of the lamb builds up a constitution, does it not?

A.P.D. There would be a certain affection in how Paul said, "our passover, Christ". How he would attract the Corinthians affectionately to Christ in that way!

B.M.D. It would bring out his own love for the Lord personally, would it not? "Our passover, Christ"; He endears Himself to us in what He has done! And then the preciousness of the blood should deepen with us. You often find with elderly people how much they dwell on the blood of Jesus.

A.P.D. That was so with Peter when he was ready to put off his tabernacle; he dwells on the blood of Christ: "precious blood", he says, 1 Pet 1: 19.

B.M.D. So why would the passover have been neglected from the days of Samuel? It does not go back to Moses; it does not go back to Exodus; it goes back to the days of Samuel the prophet. "There was no such passover". Why does it go back to Samuel the prophet?

W.A.M. Do you think that involves not only the official celebration of the passover but the spirit in which they took it up. It says there was no such passover. It does not say that there had not been any passover, but there had been none like it.

B.M.D. That is right. In a sense it had increased in its value. But then what did Samuel the prophet bring in? What was the product of Samuel the prophet? You can see what it is leading to - Abigail. It is leading into the assembly where the deepest expression of the passover lamb is cherished.

T.E.D. Was there neglect of the prophetic word? I wondered whether right through to Josiah's day there was neglect of the prophetic word. The book is found here; that has some link with the prophetic word, would you say?

B.M.D. Thank God for what has come in days of recovery in which we are privileged to have our part. The best things are reserved for the days of recovery. Let us value it! Value the books! We have to be the books. Thank God for the books but you have to become a book yourself.

A.P.D. Paul said "known and read of all men", 2 Cor 3: 2. If we could read one another we could read something assuring.

B.M.D. It is easy enough to quote - I suppose you cannot avoid it in some sense - but quote yourself: "known and read of all men".

Rem. From the time of Samuel was the danger that they wanted to be like the other nations. God, as you say, was bringing forth Hannah, David, Abigail, this character of things; but they were often wanting a king like the other nations. God was not sufficient for them, nor Samuel. Is that the danger with us?

B.M.D. Well, the prophetic word was dealing with the state of the people and, I suppose, in some sense, must have been neglected, because the ark was taken.

H.G.H. Was not the day of Samuel the day of small things?

B.M.D. I suppose it was, but the ark was taken. Think of what was involved in that! The invasion of the Philistine mind made way for

that and then corruption in the priesthood. You can see how faithfully God has brought out something in testimony from a state of ruin, but publicly what can we say? We have to get back to the basics of Christianity and that is the blood, and the spotlessness of the Victim, the Lamb.

E.F.C. It says of Samuel in one instance that he took a sucking-lamb (see 1 Sam 7: 9) in the presence of what might have been overwhelming in the enemy - a sucking-lamb, the idea of what is tender, in the presence of all the strife of man that was on display.

B.M.D. And dependence, the dependence of a sucking-lamb. How we need to learn! We are apt to be independent, are we not? We learn in this type of the spotless lamb, no blemish there, the moral perfection of the Lord Jesus.

E.F.C. Samuel was a meek and lowly man generally, but then he hewed Agag to pieces. He was firm, was he not, when it came to meeting evil?

B.M.D. It is a question of being drastic on ourselves, is it not?

Rem. If we get away in our minds - the enemy would attack our minds - affection really disappears as well, does it not? I was just thinking of the elders of Israel. They should have known better.

They said, "Why has Jehovah smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch ourselves the ark of the covenant of Jehovah out of Shiloh, that it may come among us", 1 Sam 4: 3.

They should have gone to the ark; they should have gone to God in Shiloh; He was pleased to be there. They could have enquired of God there, but they really became in character like the Philistines.

B.M.D. What you say is very interesting. We need to ponder this as we feel our way in this enquiry. Do we want to be in the practice of these things? Do we want to live Christianity, live Christ? That is what we come to in this Philippian epistle: "For me to live is Christ, and to die gain", chap 1: 21. Paul had one Man before him.

E.F.C. Say something as to what characterised Josiah.

B.M.D. He was a good king, but he finished badly.

E.F.C. But he seems to represent the spirit of recovery which is so essential at the present time.

B.M.D. We have to see there has hardly been anyone who has not had some failure; only the Lord, the Lord alone, was perfect. Josiah lost his life in battle; he interfered in battle. Interference was his downfall and yet he was a good king and they mourned his death.

This would be his greatest point, I suppose, in the recovery of the passover; there was none like it; it must have brought out the full value of the passover lamb.

A.P.D. He started very young too. Remarkable that! He was made king when young, but he himself began to do things at a young age.

B.M.D. That is encouraging for young brothers and young sisters. Let devotedness appear early! Why not? And then, as you say, he begins to do things; that is, he is in the practice of the truth.

Ques. That is a link with Samuel, is it not? He started young. You were speaking of the urgency of the present time. Would that encourage the young to come forward and fill in what is needed in the urgency of the present moment?

B.M.D. I am sure of that, but we could not say that too much.

T.E.D. They have the advantage of being free of some of the things we have gone through, so that they have a valuable service to fill in the present time.

B.M.D. So Samuel would be exemplary, the way he was there, the way he was entrusted with a message. That is very interesting, and those little coats that were brought to him each year, there were subjective exercises running along, you might say, in the sisterhood.

VANCOUVER

December 1990

Minor revision by E.C.B.

Key to initials (*identification of the speakers was not in all cases immediately available*)

E.F.Cary, Los Angeles; B.M.Deck, Motueka; A.P.Devenish, Edmonton; T.E.Druckenmiller, Plainfield; H.G.Holt, Chicago; W.A.Moseley, Vancouver; J.Pollock

A VOICE

Brian Deck

Revelation 1: 9-19; Song of Songs 2: 8-13

Both of these passages involve a voice. John "turned back to see the voice" - a remarkable statement! The voice denotes that there is a person. You may not see the person, but the voice discloses who the person is. Oh to have ears spiritually attuned to hear the voice! The Lord says of His sheep, They hear My voice; they know My voice. They would detect the voice of a stranger that it is not His voice. How important, beloved brethren, to have sensitive ears, spiritual ears, assembly ears, to discern the voice. I hope the little that can be said now may quicken that desire.

The voice involves, as I said, a person. It began in the garden: "the voice of Jehovah Elohim", Gen 3: 8. It is remarkable: "Where art thou?" God searches with a voice. Oh, the feelings they had over that voice. Sin had invaded that garden, disobedience. "Where art thou?": in some sense that voice continues and would search every one of us. Man was driven out because of his disobedience, driven out of paradise. Jesus came to recover man to paradise. I wonder if we could get some sense of the voice that would lead us back into the paradise of God. You can trace it through the Scriptures. Elijah heard a "soft gentle voice", 1 Kings 19: 12. That was God's consideration for His servant when he became despondent. It was not in the earthquake - I am diverting a bit - it was not in the fire; it was not in the wind; but "a soft gentle voice": "What doest thou here, Elijah?". Dear brethren, that would come home to us too. What are you doing here? Where are you? Elijah became despondent; he thought he was the only one left. We get like that sometimes. We should not. God might use the discipline of an earthquake or a fire or a wind. That would be discipline, but there is nothing that breaks us down more than the exceeding grace of a soft gentle voice. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest moral power in the universe. Oh that something of that power might come to us now. It

assured that beloved faithful servant that there were seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal. Be assured that the testimony of the Lord is going through, and do not be ashamed of it Paul says to Timothy (see 2 Tim 1: 8). We are in a day of small things, nothing outwardly, nothing to boast in, nothing to cater to the flesh. In some way the testimony is concluding as our blessed Lord did publicly - the cross and the grave. It affected in some sense how his beloved apostle Paul finished - a prisoner, a martyr. This is not to depress our spirits; it is to quicken us. It is to enliven us to see the urgency of the time we are in and to rise to it. The time is running out. Very, very soon He will come. There will be no delay. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" He says, Oh, I have been jealous and all these things. But God has His reserves. The testimony is going through. My concern soberly is that I would like to go through with it, please God. It is not dependent on ourselves. God has His reserves, and His testimony will go through. Do not be ashamed of it! He has not given us a spirit of cowardice. There is power to go through and be with Him in it. He is the testimony. Make Christ your life! For Paul to live was Christ: that can be for you too.

It was to John here. He had heard that voice. He had heard it at the grave of Lazarus, the same voice, the same Person. He had heard Him crying, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink", John 7: 37. That voice could meet any situation - the thirsty soul: come to me and drink. John heard the cries from the cross too. I suppose John heard the cry, "a loud voice ... which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Mark 15: 34. We could say much as to that, if we dared, because we are in the presence of the greatest things that ever happened. We can only do it in the spirit of John here at the feet of Jesus.

If you want more homework to do, you dear young brothers and sisters, search the Scriptures and find those who fell on their face at a time of crisis. You will find Moses. You will find Joshua who said to that man that met him with a drawn sword - typically the Lord - "Art thou for us, or for our enemies? ... No; for as captain of the army of Jehovah am I now come", Josh 5: 13,14. Then Joshua fell on his

face. I wonder if we are sufficiently marked by the holy spirit of reverence as we touch the things of God. They are too wonderful, so take your shoes off when you are standing on this holy ground.

Dear brethren, we are touching holy ground and it becomes us to act becomingly because of it.

John had heard the voice; he had lain in the bosom of Jesus and on His breast. He knew nearness as we can. We could not stress too much what we said: cultivate your personal links with Him, your own secret with Him. It is your own, not anybody else's. By the Spirit we are joined to the Lord. Nothing can break that, not death itself. That goes through. The highest power of man is the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is joined to our spirit so that we are the children of God. Nothing can break it. What a wonderful company! Now, John here is on the island called Patmos, alone apparently. A barren island in the Aegean Sea, is it not? There was nothing to minister to him. Hostile! If we are faithful, that is what the world is to us. If I find a place in the world, I would have to say, where am I with the One the world rejected? I speak simply because we are all in these things. There are temptations all around us, especially when we are young. I know it. We have been through our teens, and we did not win all our battles either. I did not. So we speak tenderly: beware of the world! Do not get as close as you can to it! Get as far away from it as you can! You will find the company of the One who accepted rejection and suffering for you.

Now, John knew intimacy, and he hears this voice. He is in the Spirit on the Lord's day. He had learned the secret of retiring to that precious link with another divine Person. Do you think John would have any problem about addressing the Spirit? I am sure he would not. He would know Him, "another Comforter"; in his "tribulation ... and patience" would he not instinctively turn to the comfort of "another Comforter"? Oh, beloved brethren, learn intimacy with the blessed Holy Spirit. He is a divine Person. God is here dwelling in the heart of every believer who has received the Holy Spirit. John knew that intimacy, but here he hears a voice "as of a trumpet": "and I heard behind me a great voice", and he turned back to see the

voice. Remarkable! You do not see a voice! You see a person! And that is what he saw in a way he had never seen Him before. The view here is not just as a Shepherd who leads the sheep out and they follow Him because they know the voice. John had been that way. Oh what a wonderful thing to belong to that flock - John's way of speaking of the assembly. You follow the Shepherd's voice. Where does He lead you? "In green pastures ... beside still waters", Ps 23: 2. If you go "through the valley of the shadow of death" He will be with you. Oh, what a Shepherd we have! But it is not that here. It is the depth of the Lord's feelings as coming out to the vessel, the assembly. As to her public expression here below the feelings of Christ are coming out judicially. That does not mean His love was not there; it was there. Oh how He feels the public ruin of the church! How much do we share His feelings, beloved brethren? John had never seen Him like this before with "his eyes as a flame of fire" and His garments described judicially; and he "turned back to see the voice". He was arrested by it. Let us be arrested too! I feel sometimes we speak too easily about the breakdown of the church. We are it. How deeply have we entered into the feelings of the Lord Jesus about what is next to His heart? He would invite John, as it were: You come into my feelings. "Fear not", He says. He had put His hand upon him. What a wonderful thing to be conscious of the nearness of Jesus! Think of what has come in! The ravaging! Who feels it as the Lord does? "Grievous wolves" (Acts 20: 29): Paul saw the danger of what was coming in, and he met it prophetically. I think we could say in every case the Lord has met things prophetically, but alas we did not always discern the prophetic edge to the word. In some sense we live in a very critical time, but it is not just critical, it is a wonderful time. There has never been a time of greater privilege than the moment we are in, those "upon whom the ends of the ages are come", 1 Cor 10: 11. We stand responsible in regard of the generations of faith that have preceded us, that we are to fill out our responsibility in love's committal to the Lord at the end.

I do not mean to describe these garments, even if I could. "And his voice as the voice of many waters; and having in his right

hand seven stars". What a description of this Person! And John says, "And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead". I wonder whether we have ever felt like that. He was prostrate in the presence of the greatness of the One whom he saw. The Lord appraises everything. He does not yet spue Laodicea out of His mouth. It is lukewarm! "The love of the most shall grow cold", Matt 24: 12. Do not be among them! Let us be quickened in our affections and in our interest and deepened in our committal. How the Lord feels it, but He is still walking amidst the seven golden lamps. I may be an overcomer in Thyatira and Sardis. There was one in Philadelphia, and there was one in Laodicea. As I see it, that is how the testimony of our Lord will complete, in the overcomer, maybe the ones and the twos and the threes who are faithful and will represent the whole assembly. Wonderful that He credits the whole assembly with the faithfulness of even two, as He did with Joshua and Caleb. It points to the outward smallness and fragility of the position, but carries through what is immensely vital and precious to His heart. Oh, let the appeal of it come home to us, beloved brethren!

So it says, "and he laid his right hand upon me". That is the hand of power. There was John prostrate on his face before his Master and "his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one". Oh, dear brethren, that is the side of victory, "the living one". He says, "I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages". What depths were in this: "I became dead"! That could not be said of anyone else but Jesus. He did not die in weakness; He died in power. He laid down His life. It was not taken from Him. If we are left here we will finally die from weakness because we cannot sustain life. There was no weakness with Jesus! He cried with a loud voice. He died in vigour. Who could explain it? Let us not try! It is too momentous. It is inscrutable. We must be careful not to intrude into what is inscrutable, the humanity of Jesus and His vicarious work involving the cross, the three hours, and the grave, and the resurrection, and His being received up in glory.

Think of that, that wonderful vicarious work of Jesus! What is

becoming is to be on our faces at His feet! And then He puts His right hand upon him.

"And I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades". They are in good hands. Leave them there! He knows what is going on. The Lord is in control. He would say, You must trust Me. We do not know what belongs to that condition. He does: He has been there. He has established His rights in the very domain of death. He is in control there. He has the keys. Presently He will use them as to those who are sleeping in Jesus. They will hear the voice - that is another voice - of the Son of God. That is the next thing to take place; the voice of the Son of God will rend the tombs of the saints. "Then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air", 1 Thess 4: 17. Oh let the faith of it rise within us to see the tremendous privilege that attaches to the present time. So John "turned back to see the voice", and this is what he saw. Let us be sobered by the whole public path of the testimony and be identified with it as an overcomer!

Now, I want to speak of another voice, not the judicial side, "the voice of my beloved"! It turns me to the Song. "The voice", she says, "of my beloved! Behold, he cometh, Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills." This is the lover of the church, the same Person. His love is not changed; His Person is unchanging; He is the assembly's Beloved. He is the Father's Beloved. That belongs to Him alone, uniquely, to the lover, but we are "taken ... into favour in the Beloved" (Eph 1: 6), but He is the assembly's Beloved. May I ask you, Is He your Beloved? It says here, "The voice of my beloved!" What is He saying? "My beloved spake and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away". This takes us to the Supper, but it will take us into more than that. What a sense we have, when the Lord comes in in the breaking of the bread, that He is near, that He has come to us. He lifts us out of the wilderness conditions with all its sorrows and its anguish. Who of us are without them? He says, You come away, I will lift you up out of this.

Beloved, at any moment that will be in its actuality. "Rise up, my

love, my fair one, and come away. For behold, the winter is past, The rain is over, it is gone". Wonderful that we can touch this in our spirits as in assembly! Let us know it more! I would venture to say that perhaps we need a deeper awareness of His coming in and taking control. He would say, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away". He wants to take us somewhere else. He takes us where there is the lovers call. It says, "And the voice of the turtle-dove is heard", not in 'my land' but "in our land". It suggests that there is a land He shares with His assembly: "head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all", Eph 1: 23. What a wonderful prospect to share that headship in a heavenly sphere; Emmanuel's land, if you like. It is "our land". We are so united; we are so one; He said, You come into "our land". The voice of the turtle-dove is love's call. That is where it is heard. I suppose there is an allusion to the Spirit underlying it. Oh the lowliness of the place which that blessed divine Person has taken - the lowest place. The Father is in the place of supremacy; the Son is in a relative place; the Spirit has taken the third place. Oh the wisdom of the ways of God in revealing Himself to persons such as you and me, that we should know God and grow in the true knowledge of God against all the error that persists in the profession. Oh let us be free of it and be "growing by the true knowledge of God", Col 1: 10.

He says, "The time of singing is come ... The figtree melloweth her winter figs". How wonderful that is! They have come through the winter, through the rigours, through the problems, through the church sorrows. When we look round on our older brethren we thank God for them. They have stood in their generation. They have been mellowed in a maturity and are valuable. Get alongside of them. Talk to them. We know the Lord is about to come, but if He delays, we need to step into the ranks of those whom the Lord takes. I heard a dear brother say once that he looked forward to his dissolution; he looked forward to the experience of his departure to be with Christ. It is much better. If we are here when the Lord comes we will not have that. I suppose when we are young we think

that might be the best, but it is not. In any case we can be absolutely restful. It is in the hands of the One who loves us more than we realise and He is coming.

So it says, "And the vines in bloom give forth their fragrance". Then He repeats it, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away! " Let us be ready, dear brethren, at any moment to rise to that call. He is coming, the Lord Jesus! "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come", Rev 22: 17.

"Come, Lord Jesus"; He says, "Yea, I come quickly", (v 20). May the Lord help us!

VANCOUVER

December 1990

Minor revision by E.C.B.

BAPTISED CHILDREN

Over fifty years ago Mr James Taylor wrote in a letter that, as household baptism became more recognised, the proportion of children turning to the Lord and accepting the fellowship of His death would become larger. Although baptism is not necessary for salvation of the soul, it is ordained in the Scriptures. It seems that the apostles were not baptised, but were sent out to baptise other people into the public profession of Christianity.

Most children reading these things will doubtless have been baptised in infancy and will have no memory of the occasion. Very briefly, it involves going out of sight through water and reappearing, even as the Lord Jesus was buried and rose again. The full name of the person to be baptised is called and followed by the baptismal words "to the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

Believing parents, in the exercise of faith, recognise that it is right to have their children baptised, leaving it in confidence with God that He will work in their hearts to bring them into the full blessing of Christianity. As you will remember, there are instances in Scripture where households have been baptised, such as that of the jailor at Philippi and that of Stephanas. As in our own day, the young people there would understand that household baptism calls for obedience to parents. The commandment in the early Scriptures to do this is the first one with a promise. Do you enjoy it?

J.C.Evershed