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Contents

THE PERFECT SERVANT

LOVE FOR THE ASSEMBLY

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

HOPEFUL CHILDREN

THE PERFECT SERVANT

Paul Martin

Isaiah 42: 1-4; John 21: 1-23; Acts 9: 10-19

I want to speak of the perfect Servant, and then of the way in which He deals with His servants - for we are all servants in one sense, or ought to be. Early in our Christian experience we are to learn what it is to place our body on the altar for that is to be our intelligent service. The believer has a wonderful privilege in presenting his body to God, and in doing so he becomes available for the will of God in His testimony. I wonder if everyone here has put their body on the altar. I would encourage you, dear brother or sister, to do so, that in the very presence of the appeal of the death of Jesus for you, you might be prepared to place all that you are and all that you have at His disposal. Think of who it was who came in and suffered for you; He came in to win your heart. How did He come in? We love that reference in Mr Darby's hymn (No.188): 'Nor yet in triumph passing, But human infancy!' Think of the Lord Jesus coming in to the poorest of circumstances and then laying down His life that He might win your heart. Have you given it to Him? I would appeal to you - do not go on without having given your heart to Christ. He has given His all for you. He came that He might suffer and die and that He might win your heart. I say, have you given it to Him? If you have given your heart wants to have you entirely for Himself. Why not place your body today on the altar if you have never done it before? Just tell Him that you want to be here in His testimony for His will, no longer to please yourself but to please Him who has died for us and has also been raised. What a privilege, in any measure in which we can take it up, to be here serviceable to God!

I want to speak primarily about the perfect Servant, for God draws attention to Him. He says "Behold my servant". Think of what the Lord Jesus was here for God as His servant. We often dwell on what He was here as serving mankind, but primarily He came in to serve God. It is true that the burden, all the sorrow of mankind,

rested on Jesus. "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows", Isa 53: 4. He took on Himself all the sorrows that were present upon humanity, but in His service, primarily, He came to serve God, not only setting forth God to man - great and glorious as that was and only He could reveal Him - but serving God in view of securing from man an answer that would eternally be for the blessed God. "Behold my servant". There have been many servants, men like Moses and David, who ministered to the will of God in their generation; God is drawing attention not to Moses or to David but to Christ. Think of the delight of the Father just to say to us today, Simply fix your eyes on My Servant. The danger may sometimes be with us to look at men who have helped us, to the exclusion of looking beyond them to Christ. The Father would say "Behold my servant". How He loved to draw attention to Him! What a Servant He was! Every thought of God centred in Him, carrying every thought of God through in a pathway of absolute perfection and right through death. Everything was vested in one blessed Man. All that He took up, He took up in love to God - "I love my master, my wife, and my children", Exod 21: 15. What love for God there was in that Servant! He was different from every other servant; Moses became angry with the people, David counted the people; something had risen in the hearts of such men that was not according to God, but never once did anything contrary arise in the heart of Jesus. What a spirit He manifested! One thing that tests us when difficulties arise, as it did with Moses and David, is our spirits, but the spirit of Jesus was never disturbed. I might say what another has said: Be careful of a man who cannot keep his spirit and do not trust his judgment. But you can always trust the judgment of Jesus for "he shall bring forth judgment to the nations". What a spirit was manifested! Even at a time when His works of power had been rejected, when they had not repented, He says "I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth", Matt 11: 25. People might say that His service had produced no result, but that service had produced what delighted the heart of God. While He served in the midst of the greatest rejection He drew out the pleasure of God in every word that He uttered. "Behold my servant". O beloved, let us behold Him! He moved in

faithfulness. Think of the One who walked into the temple beholding the tables of the money-changers; what righteous indignation filled His soul! He says "make not my Father's house a house of merchandise" John 2: 16. He was considering for His Father, He knew what delighted His Father. He did not consider for Himself in His service. How perfect were the movements of Jesus! Let us be occupied with them, for if any of us are to take up any small service - and I suppose most service is rendered in secret - let us remember the spirit of the One of whom the Father could say, "Behold my servant". Another order of man was serving God, and God will be served only by that order of man. He will never resort to man according to the flesh to serve Him. No, we are to "serve God ... with reverence and fear, For also our God is a consuming fire", Heb 12: 28,29. Let us remember the One before whom we are. Service may be in occasions like this, or in service from house to house, such as Paul rendered so effectively among the saints at Ephesus for three years night and day with tears (see Acts 20: 20,31). What service was that! What spirit was manifested! Beloved brother or sister, are we able for it? Have you a heart for Christ that can yearn for the saints, that can shed tears with them and over them as Paul did? We are in a day when the enemy is attacking; there is much to be done in faithfulness to Christ and in love for Him and in the valuation of the One of whom God could speak here: "Behold my servant whom I uphold, my elect in whom my soul delighteth!" Think of the soul of God delighting in Jesus! How wonderful it is just to ponder it! To speak reverently, the very inwards of God rejoiced at what was found in the perfect Servant here. It says "I will put my Spirit upon him". Think of Jesus moving in the glory and dignity of the anointing. The anointing carries its own weight and character and influence. As manifested among believers it brings out a certain character that you will never find anywhere else. It says, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street".

When the Lord came in, there was a system marked by persons drawing attention to themselves, but He came in, not to draw attention to Himself but to serve God. Mr Darby says, 'O lowliness, how feebly known' (hymn 138). Think of the lowliness of the

Servant. He moved here in humiliation, taking a bondman's form. I touch on these things just to give us something of the character and the spirit of the One who served in perfection. He served His own too, He loved those who were in the world, He loved them through everything (see John 13: 1). I often wonder at that; think of the failures of the disciples, failures of men like Peter - not to make much of them, they are there for our learning - but the Lord loved them through them all. O, what a Servant, what a Shepherd! He laid aside His garments, He washed the feet of the disciples. Peter says "Thou shalt never wash my feet", John 13: 8. Think of the power that was there in the person of the Lord Jesus; He drew His own, He carried them through everything.

In John 21 the Lord is dealing with His own. I think John adds this last chapter for the present moment. He writes for the last days; it is almost as if John put his pen down and picked it up again and said, I feel led to write as to the recovery of the Lord's own. We are in a day publicly of departure but let us never lose sight that the Lord has in view recovery, recovering His servants. They were not eternally lost, they were lost for the moment in availability and serviceability. The Lord would bring His servants round, He had great things in view for them, they were to be serviceable and go out into public service as men who were adjusted. No servant is serviceable unless he is adjustable; we shall always need adjustment. These men were adjustable; the Lord wins them round. Peter had said "I go to fish". You can understand Peter doing that because everything seemed lost. I suppose he was despondent.

Have you ever been despondent, ever felt like giving up? I have. There is no exercise where there is not a living link with Christ. It is a living link with Him that the enemy is seeking to overthrow. If there is the desire to be near to Him there will be exercise to the end. How gracious the Lord is in bringing us round! He says, Children, have ye anything to eat? They answered him, No". Dear brother or sister, have you anything to eat? What are you feeding on today? I remember the words of a beloved servant: If you feed on the problems you become a problem. Let us not feed on the problems,

let us carry them prayerfully, tearfully, but along with that let us feed upon Christ. We will never carry any burden rightly in the testimony if that burden becomes an obsession. Let us feed upon Christ. He is able to keep us, to hold our spirits, to give us a second touch if things are not seen clearly. Let us keep near to Him. There is no other hiding place; "a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a cover from the storm", Isa 32: 2. Keep near to Him, find in His presence, as Peter found here, that things take on a different view, that the Lord puts His own touch upon matters. It says, "he shall bring forth judgment according to truth". Everything in the assembly is to be according to truth, it is to be maintained that way. The Lord will bring it forth finally in a day yet to come, he will establish judgment according to truth, but in the assembly it is already so. It is to be so in our local companies that He brings forth judgment according to truth. The Lord has the provision, He has the means whereby the disciples can catch. He has everything in His hand, why do we not trust Him more? If I do not trust Him enough, it is because I have not finished with the man that He has finished with, the man that feels he can do something, but can fish all night and catch nothing. Let us trust Him, let us keep near to Him. The Spirit would help us to be maintained in vitality of communion with Christ.

Peter has to come to that in this chapter. So it says "When therefore they went out on the land, they see a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it". The Lord had all the provision but He says "Bring of the fishes which ye have now taken". See the grace of the Lord Jesus; He is not setting aside what they had caught, He is taking it up now, it is under His control. When we come under the control of the Lord He is able to take up what we may do in feebleness. Let us wait for the word of the Lord. When the Lord tells Peter to bring the fishes he was able for it; neither he nor the seven were able for it before, but at one word from the Lord Peter is able to bring the net.

Let us be available to His word. The situation is not going to be lost, He is going to gather it, bring it to a completion. He was doing that with these disciples and He will do it today. The Lord will bring things through to a conclusion. He has the power for that. You may say, but I must do it. He may use you or me in it but it will be He that

will use us, if we are prepared to go out of sight first, that the glory may be all His own. Let us be prepared for the humbling that would remove us out of sight in order that the glory may belong to Him and Him only.

Then the Lord searches Peter. The Lord would search any who are real. He searched him because He knew he was real. Has the Lord ever searched you? He does it because He likes to bring out the value of His work - not to Himself because He knew it all the time - as He does here to Peter. Peter had not long before denied the Lord. I do not think the Lord had said anything directly to Peter from that moment to this. Does He refer to it here? No, He does not.

"Behold my servant". What a spirit was there in perfection in the Master. Peter had been exposed by the look of Jesus. The Lord had suffered on the cross for what Peter had done and Peter had wept bitterly. The matter was finished and the Lord had no need to raise it again. The grace of the Lord Jesus! You may say, matters are being overlooked. Nothing was being overlooked. Peter was recovered entirely for the Lord. The Lord is recovering persons today, securing them. Some of us may have nominally gone on, outwardly correct. The Lord is recovering the person not the place.

There is only one place for you, only one place for me, and that is Christ's place. The place that He has is my place, and He is recovering persons to Himself. O, let us be recovered. Peter was recovered here. It has been said that in the assembly there is always the maintenance of judgment. Of course that is right, but there is never the expression of punishment in the assembly. I mention that because at times it may come into our spirits. Matters arise, there is to be judgment according to truth, but there is never punishment in the assembly. At times action has to be taken but it is always in view of recovery. The Lord always had recovery in view with His own. There was never punishment and there is never to be punishment in our thinking in the assembly. I touch on these things because they bear upon us at the present moment. The Lord speaks to Peter, He tests him as to his love. Peter was a lover of Christ. I trust everyone here is a lover of the Lord Jesus. Dear

young people, I appeal to you, begin early to be a lover of Jesus and be maintained as a lover. The Spirit would help us that the Lord Jesus may have the place that He is worthy of in our affections. If He has that place it will be to the exclusion of everything else. Why is it that we drop to things that are not in keeping with the glory of the person of Jesus, not in keeping with our calling? Why is it that Peter dropped back to his fishing? It is because we lose sight of the glory of the One who is the centre of the world for which we have been secured. Mr Darby said, I would not tell a believer not to be worldly, but I would tell him that he has a Head in heaven and he belongs to that world. I appeal to you, you do not belong to this world, do not dabble in it, you belong to the world where Christ is. Go through it as lightly as you can, but have your heart in the world where Christ is. Fix your eyes upon Jesus. One could say, 'Look full in His glorious face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace'. Set your heart on that world. Peter is being recovered in view of his part in the testimony, in the light of Christ in that world.

Then Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me". There was no one else to follow. Peter had lost sight of the Lord for the moment but His eyes are now fixed upon Him. I think you could say, as you read through the Acts, that Peter kept his eye on Christ. In what power he stood up with the eleven! What results there were! He speaks to them of the One who had been rejected by men but had been raised up. God had reversed the judgment of the world and Peter was setting that before men in Jerusalem. But then, here, he sees the disciple who also leaned at table on the breast of Jesus and says, "Lord, and what of this man?" When the Lord Jesus was here He came into conditions of physical limitation and, could I say carefully, there was room only for a John when the Lord lay at table, but today there is room for each of us on the breast of Jesus. Take up your place there, do not settle for anything less than to be conscious of drawing from the support and affections of that blessed Man where He is now.

Ananias was a brother who had to be adjusted too. You might say it was not a great service for which the Lord took Ananias up but it was a most valuable one and, in his adjustment, Ananias had to learn the value of a brother who had been wrought upon by divine grace. Let us not lose sight of the value of the brother. "He said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus that appeared to thee in the way in which thou earnest". The Lord did not tell him to say that. See how adjustable Ananias was. He learnt immediately that if the Lord had a valuation of Saul then he was to have one. It is of no credit to me if I lose my local brother. I think it has been said in the good teaching that, if I lose a brother in my locality, it shows that I have failed in my responsibility in faithfulness to God. Let us learn what the value of a brother is to God. You might say, principles must be stood for, and so they must, and the truth must be stood for and so it must, at all cost, but I also have a responsibility to God to secure my brethren in relation to the principles and in relation to the truth, and if I fail in that I have failed God in my responsibility. These things have been taught us before, I am saying nothing new; Paul says, "to write the same things to you, to me is not irksome, and for you safe", Phil 3: 1. Let us learn to value the brother. I could say simply from my own experience that some of us have known what it is not to have a local brother, and that is very exercising, you miss the value of a brother. Thank God that in His grace in most of our localities we have a good number of brethren with whom to work out the truth. Let us work it out in love, maintaining the standard and holding the saints in our affections in order that they might be secured at the full measure of God's thoughts in relation to His will.

May the Lord help us. As I said, we shall need adjustment right to the end. We are in conditions in which the Lord would have His way with us, but he will adjust us in His way. Let us be kept near to Him; let us be like a Peter or an Ananias who had simple relations with the Lord. Think of Ananias saying just what he thought: "Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man"; what simplicity of relationship he had with the Lord! Let us develop that simplicity of relationship in order that the Lord may have His way with us and that

we might be more serviceable in His testimony until He come. May it be so, for His Name's sake.

GLASGOW

22 August 1992

LOVE FOR THE ASSEMBLY

Cyril Dadd

Nehemiah 1: 1-11; 2: 1-9; Psalm 137: 1-7

I have read this section in Nehemiah to direct our thoughts and attention to a man who loved Jerusalem. We want to catch God's thoughts about Jerusalem. I am not thinking of it as to what it means from the viewpoint of what is religious, but of what it means to the heart of God; it is the city of God, the city of Christ's God. It has a long history. The Lord went to Jerusalem, as we know; He came down from the mountain and made His way to Jerusalem where He would be slain outside the city. Yet with all these thoughts, the history going into it, God is thinking still of Jerusalem. We see that at the end of Luke's gospel where they were to remain in the city until they had been clothed with power from on high and the gospel was to be preached beginning at Jerusalem. You wonder at that, do you not? It is the place where the most terrible things in the history of time had been perpetrated, where the Lord was crucified between two criminals, and yet the gospel was to be preached beginning at Jerusalem, showing how God was moving in grace and in mercy.

The Lord asked that they be forgiven; Stephen said "lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7: 60) but the Lord said "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34. Think of the grace shining out in Christ under the most difficult circumstances! Men in hatred had put Him on the cross, and yet the Lord could say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". It shows how the Lord in grace was reaching out to a people who had rejected Him.

Nehemiah is a remarkable man because he is a Jerusalem-lover. Daniel was also. He had his windows open toward Jerusalem, praying three times a day (see Dan 6: 10). It showed his attitude of mind, his thoughts and feelings and affections were toward what God loved. We need to cultivate this so that we become Jerusalem-lovers, increasingly lovers of the assembly. It says of the Lord Jesus that He loved the assembly and delivered

Himself up for it (see Eph 5: 25). These thoughts, beloved, we need to get into our hearts and, like the writer of the Psalm says, "if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy".

With Nehemiah it is the time of the captivity. Ezra built the altar and the house, but then with the altar and the house rebuilt there is something needing to be protected, the idea of something being valued. This is what we need in our own time, to get over to what the Lord values in such a way that it needs to be protected, needs the wall - the principles of the fellowship. All of us are aware that we are in a time when the enemy is constantly working away trying to turn the edge and reduce the principles of the fellowship to the idea of the mind of men. The Lord has certain principles that He is moving by, and they involve the fellowship, involve the line of protection; it means that you are keeping something out and are holding something in, you are valuing something. It is today, you might say, in the twos and the threes. Not that we claim anything; we cannot in one sense other than that we love Christ and are seeking to hold something that is precious to His own heart.

So Nehemiah makes inquiry from Hanani. "As I was in Shushan the fortress, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah"; "one of my brethren" is a fine touch, one of his brethren had come and he can carefully inquire from this brother "concerning the Jews that had escaped, who were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem". He was a man who loved the people and who loved Jerusalem. I believe, beloved, that these are the feelings that God is seeking to generate in our own hearts at this time, that we might increasingly love the people of God and love the assembly. Get it into us, love the people, they are what is indispensable. We are in a time when every one is precious, and every one is indispensable. We need to hold on to that because it is the feelings of Christ as to His own. The shepherd in Luke 15 leaves the ninety and nine and goes and seeks the one that is lost, and having found it he puts it on his shoulders. That would show to us that all the brethren are indispensable; we need each other. Let us value each other. Attachment to Christ is the test of the present day.

If we are not currently attached to Christ we will not have the wherewithal to hold us according to the will of God.

So Nehemiah gets this word and prays to God, and he eats the sin-offering; he says, "confessing the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee; both I and my father's house have sinned". We need increasingly to learn to eat the sin-offering.

It means that we learn how to judge ourselves, and this is one of the things that should mark the way we assemble tomorrow morning, coming up as having eaten the sin-offering; having been in the presence of God we have had every matter worked out according to His will. We are confessing our sins and the sins of the people; I believe it gives God a basis to bring in blessing, which He does with Nehemiah. Nehemiah prays a very fine prayer. He goes back to the promises of God which came in through Moses. I think it is a good thing to remind God of His promises, and in doing so we can take God at His word. We find examples of this in Scripture, that persons take God at His word, and we are in a time when we need to fall back on the word of God. We remind God of His own thoughts, things that He has indicated, and that the Lord could say when He was here, 'the gates of hades shall not prevail'. It runs through my mind at the present moment that everything around us looks as if the enemy is having his way, but the Lord said the gates of hades shall not prevail against the assembly which He would build on the rock.

So we can remind God of these great thoughts, remind Christ of the thoughts that He has brought into expression and which He intends to see through. You can hardly think anything other than that what is of God is going through because it is sustained in the power of the Spirit of God. To think in any other way would be to think unworthily of the present service of the Spirit of God.

Nehemiah says he is the king's cupbearer and then that he was unhappy in the presence of the king: "And the king said to me, Why is thy face sad, seeing thou art not sick?". Then he says to the king, "Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres lies waste, and its gates are consumed with fire? And the king said to me, For what dost thou make request? So I

prayed to the God of the heavens". I think that is fine, an expression of dependence. Here he is in the presence of the king and the king said, What do you want, your face is sad and there is reason for this; he tells him the reason, and then the king says, Tell me what you want. What a challenging matter! Nehemiah says, "I prayed to the God of the heavens", momentarily he lifts his heart to the God of the heavens to get the guidance he needed. It is a great thing in the testimony that we are able to fall back on our own link with God. We can lift our hearts at any time to the Father. So Nehemiah gets his direction from God, and the prosperity and the blessing of what he is undertaking lies in the fact that he is getting his direction from God.

It says later on, "And I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me but I told no man what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem" (vv 11,12). What is God putting in our hearts to do for the assembly? It is a challenge to us. Are we truly assembly-minded persons? That is what comes out in Matthew's gospel - assembly-minded personnel. I believe we need help that we might become increasingly assembly-minded persons. So he says, "but I told no man what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem". I think it comes back to our secret links with the Lord. It is a fine thing to have your own secret links with Christ. You have uninterrupted means of communication with Christ Himself. He told no man, but this is what he was carrying in his affections, what God had put in his heart to do for Jerusalem. What is God putting in our hearts to do for the assembly? This is a great challenge to us at the present time.

The Lord would help us as to it. I think the assembly time tomorrow is a time when the Lord says to us afresh that He loves the assembly, as Paul could say, "Christ also loved the assembly, and has delivered himself up for it, in order that he might ... present the assembly to himself glorious", Eph 5: 25-27. Beloved, what is God putting in our hearts to do for the assembly now? Let us challenge ourselves. Nehemiah had not told anybody about this, but what God put in his heart to do for Jerusalem is going forward.

Now just a touch as to what the psalmist comes to. He refers obviously to the time of the captivity in Babylon: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion". Think of what Zion meant to God! Zion was part of Jerusalem but it was something very special. "We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof". They had been carried away captive; it says, "For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song". Then he goes on: "If I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill". It sounds like things that marked David, does it not? It does not say who wrote the psalm; of the next one it says specifically that it was David. The psalmist speaks of his right hand and its skill (David certainly had the skill, what a skilled warrior he was!); he says, "If I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill". This is the psalmist expressing the feelings of God. We are in a day when the assembly is being forgotten, when what is precious to the heart of Christ is being overlooked, put on one side, but the psalmist says, "If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to my palate; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy". I think that is a man who is reflecting the feelings of Christ, what Christ has set His affections upon, loving the assembly, delivering Himself up for it; it is the apple of His eye. We get some of these feelings coming out in the Song of Songs. We know that the Song relates to a repentant and recovered Israel, but then too it can be applied to Christ and the assembly, and there we have the thought of what is very precious coming into expression. Here, I think, the psalmist brings that out.

Well, we will have this opportunity tomorrow to catch the feelings of Christ for the assembly, that vessel of peculiar choice. There is nothing like it, nothing as near to Deity as the assembly. It is a divine conception. Therefore the Lord is in a peculiar way preparing the assembly to present it to Himself, perfect, without spot or wrinkle or any of such things. That is the way the assembly will be presented to Himself, and we will touch this tomorrow; we get into an area of things which sin has never invaded, outside the domain of breakdown and failure with which we are so familiar, and we come

into an area where everything is of God, everything is of Christ, and the assembly is there in all its perfection, because only what is perfect can come out of Christ, that is the point of origin of the assembly, the side of Christ.

Well, beloved, let us carry this in our affections and come up tomorrow freighted, not with our own matters and our own thoughts about our own businesses and such like, but with thoughts of Christ and the assembly. Let us be assemblyminded persons; let us be Jerusalem-lovers such as Nehemiah was, for His Name's sake.

ORMOND BEACH

20 June 1992

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Cecil Elliott

John 3: 1-5; 4: 6-11; 5: 1-10

A word that is very important in the preaching is the little word need - a small word but very important. The Lord Jesus said, "I am not come to call righteous persons, but sinful ones" (Luke 5: 32) - persons in need. There are people who have need and do not know it, and there are others who have need and do know it. In Revelation the Lord had to say to one of the churches, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold purified by fire", chap 3: 18. A state reached in that church that meant that there was a need: the Lord said "thou art the wretched and the miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked", but they did not feel their need of Jesus. People have a need for Jesus, a need for the Saviour. We sometimes sing:

'I could not do without Thee,
O Saviour of the lost' (Hymn 220)

- Lost, and as we sometimes also sing, 'By sin undone'. Do you feel your need for Jesus? He is available today; He is not far off. It was need like ours that drew Him down from His throne on high. He comes to persons in need. Do you feel you have a need for a Saviour? Do you feel that you ought not to be without the Saviour? Well, if a need is stirred up in your soul, Jesus is great enough to fill the need.

This man in chapter 3 came to Jesus by night; there was a need in his soul. He was a teacher among the Jews, a ruler, but he had a need, and he came to Jesus, the One who is able to meet every need. The greatest need is soul need, something which all the wealth and pleasures of the world cannot satisfy. Only Jesus can satisfy it. This man came to Jesus by night, maybe because of the fear of being seen going to Jesus, He said, "Rabbi, we know that thou art come a teacher from God, for none can do these signs that thou doest unless God be with him". Is that the belief of every one gathered here? The preaching is a sign. God has worked with us - a

sign, a miracle. Jesus has worked in our hearts that were darkened and deep in sin so that there is something for God Himself. "None can do these signs that thou doest unless God be with him". Jesus did not turn him away. O, the grace of the Saviour! Whoever you are, the hymn writer says, 'Come as you are in all your sin'. Jesus never turns any away. Come just as you are, Jesus is ready and waiting and willing now to save.

This man came by night and he found the Lord Jesus ready to give him what he needed. The Lord says, "Except any one be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God". That was not what Nicodemus was expecting to hear, but that is the news; Jesus tells the truth. He knows the condition of every sinner; He knows our histories, He knows every heartbeat, every desire of our hearts in relation to Himself or to anything else. But He said to Nicodemus, "Except any one be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God".

Nicodemus did not understand; he says, "How can a man be born being old?". But Jesus answered, "Except any one be born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God". Jesus went into death: He had to go by way of death. A whole order of man was obnoxious to God, for they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

If we are living our lives in the flesh it is obnoxious to God, we cannot please God. Jesus went by way of death in order fully and effectively to remove that order of man from before the eye of God.

It has never done and never will do for God; it had to go by way of death. Jesus went into death; He took your liability and mine upon Himself, everything that stood out against us, the burden of our sins. How grievous, how painful, all that He went through; He took it upon Himself. We sometimes sing, 'My guilt was borne by Jesus' He bore it all. He says to Nicodemus, "Except any one be born of water and of Spirit". God had to bring in a new order of manhood in Christ, His well-beloved Son. God had a righteous way to deal with the first order of manhood; it had to be removed completely from the eye of a righteous and holy God, and it could not be dealt with other than by death-three days and three nights the Lord Jesus was in the heart of the earth. So the word to Nicodemus was, "Except any one be born

anew". Is there a sense of being born anew in all our hearts? Do we know what it is to be born anew, to have a new appreciation of Jesus, a fresh desire in relation to Him, an increased appetite in relation to what is pleasurable to God? Are you indwelt by the Holy Spirit, a new source, a new spring of life? Or are we going on with the old order of things that cannot please God? The word to Nicodemus was, "Except any one be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God". If the Spirit is in our hearts His delight is to focus our attention on Christ, and the more we let the Spirit do so the more we are helped to gaze upon the beauties of that blessed Man, and the more we become like Him.

The woman in chapter 4 had a need. I do not suppose it was the first time she had gone to the well, but she had a need, and there might be a need in your soul. What is the need in your heart at the present time? Is there in it any outgoing in relation to Jesus? This woman had a need and she went to the well as on any other day but this time it was different, the Saviour had come to meet her.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, but this time the Saviour came and placed Himself in relation to this woman. He knew she was going to be there, as He knows your heart and mine at the present time. The Lord Jesus came and placed Himself where He was available to this woman, and that is what He does in the preaching, He placed Himself where He is available to you and to me. No circumstance is too humble, no heart too far gone, that Jesus cannot come in and make a way for Himself. No area in your heart is inaccessible to Jesus or to the Spirit.

So Jesus came to this woman who no doubt had gone to the well many times before. Maybe you have been at the preaching many times before, but this time the Lord Jesus comes again in grace in order to appeal to your affections. He says to the woman, "Give me to drink". If He should make that request of you, do you have anything you could offer to Him? On one occasion the Lord Jesus went to His own and said, "have ye anything here to eat?" John 21: 5. The Lord Jesus had need. The Father has need; elsewhere in the chapter He says "the Father seeks such as his

worshippers" (v 23). Divine Persons have need. It is good for us to get hold of that; not only has the sinner need for a Saviour but divine Persons have need. Think of the volume and the depth and the riches of the praises that arise from the hearts of sinners, ransomed people, redeemed sinners, in relation to Christ. There is a time coming when there will be people who will say, "Worthy is the Lamb that has been slain, to receive power, and riches ... and honour, and glory", Rev 5: 12, but people are saying it at the present time.

The Lord Jesus came where this woman was and said, "Give me to drink". If the Lord Jesus came to you at the present time and said, Give me to drink, what is there in your heart for Him? Is there anything in your heart, in your life, in your outlook, that the Spirit of God can draw upon and channel it to Jesus? The Lord says, "Give me to drink". The woman said, "How dost thou, being a Jew, ask to drink of me who am a Samaritan woman". The Lord Jesus is going to open up channels in her heart in relation to Himself. Then later He speaks of "living water". She came with her need, but she "left her waterpot and went away into the city, and said to the men, Come, see a man". She came empty but she went away filled in her affections with Jesus. Then she could draw attention to that Man.

So if the Lord Jesus comes to you, in what state is your heart? There was one who could say, My heart is welling forth with a good matter concerning the King (see Ps 45: 1). Can you say that in sincerity and in truth? Can you say that your heart is filled with good things in relation to Jesus? This woman came empty but went away as a vessel for the Master. She drew the attention of others to Jesus. At first she had a need which no one else could meet: all the connections she had before could not meet the condition of her heart, but Jesus came in and was allowed to have the place that rightly belongs to Him. There is nothing that can fill the soul as Jesus can. We spoke earlier of being filled with the Spirit; His constant work is to glorify Christ, to fill our vessels, keep them up to the brim, and then joy comes in, praise toward God. So let us keep these vessels filled for the Master. Continue to feel the need of the Saviour: you cannot do without Him. If you ever get to the point

where you feel you are good enough, that you do not need Him, that is no good. Continue to feel the need for a Saviour, feel as the hymn-writer says,

'I could not do without Thee,
O Saviour of the lost'

Do you think you can get along without Jesus? I say, None can. People may think they can, but there will be a day of reckoning; it is coming soon, the time when the Lord is coming to take His own to be with Himself, those who have an appreciation of Himself, in whose hearts the work of God is proceeding. What a time it is going to be for those who have managed to get along without Jesus in this world! Be among those to whom, when the Lord comes, there is something in hearts in relation to Himself. This woman had her need met, and more than her need, she became a person who brought others to Jesus, she was so taken up with the Man. The gospel is to help us, to fill our hearts with that blessed Man in whom God has found His delight.

In the next passage there is a man who was in his condition of infirmity for thirty and eight years. He just lay there. It says, "In these lay a multitude of sick, blind, lame, withered, awaiting the moving of the water. For an angel descended at a certain season in the pool and troubled the water. Whoever therefore first went in after the troubling of the water became well, whatever disease he laboured under". How remarkable that was! Whatever condition the soul is in, Jesus is able to meet the need.

There is no condition too far out for Jesus. When He took on your liabilities He took on every condition of heart. He went to the cross, suffered and died and was buried. He took on every liability that you can think of. It gives us a sense of the enormity of what He took on - the sin of the world. What a burden! How great it was to Him. It gives us some idea of how He felt when He prayed, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me", Matt 26: 39. Every single issue that sin had brought in, that estranged man from God, Jesus took on. How great the liability - many sins. The Lord Jesus said of

one woman: "Her many sins are forgiven", Luke 7: 47. He is the only One who could bear our sins and the One who could forgive sins.

This man was in this condition for thirty and eight years; that is a long time. Imagine this man's condition day after day, how hopeless it must have seemed to him. But Jesus came to him, He came where he was, as He came to the woman in chapter 4. There is no condition, no area that is inaccessible to Jesus. It says in Revelation: "I stand at the door and am knocking", chap 3: 20. He appeals to us constantly in the preaching. He comes, as He did to this man. It says, "Jesus seeing this man lying there, and knowing that he was in that state now a great length of time, says to him, Wouldest thou become well?" The Lord Jesus knows the need of every soul, every condition of heart. He is the Lord of glory, the Saviour of sinners. We sometimes think that no one knows what we are going through, but Jesus knows everything. There is no issue beyond Jesus: He has feelings, He was tempted in all points like as we are, sin apart (see Heb 4: 15). How unique is the Person! He is able to come in in priestly grace and lift our souls up from these conditions to attract us to Himself. So He comes to this man and says, "Wouldest thou become well?". The man said, "Sir, I have not a man, in order that, when the water has been troubled, to cast me into the pool". But Jesus says to him, "Arise, take up thy couch and walk". He had not a man, but the Man is available, the Man Christ Jesus. How near Jesus comes when there is a need. Through this gospel of John you find people in need and Jesus meets it: the man in chapter 9, the man born blind ends up worshipping the Lord Jesus. He comes to individuals no matter what the condition, whatever her distance because of sin. He said to this man, rise, "take up thy couch and walk". Thirty and eight years, a life-time: it was not beyond Jesus.

Why not come to Jesus now and spend the rest of your days for His glory and praise? You realise that you have a need; it was sinners Jesus came to save, not righteous persons, not those who do not feel the need of repentance. In Romans 7 it says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of

death? " (v 24). Someone was crying out, realising the wretchedness that was in himself, but he goes on to say, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord". There was the need and it was met by Jesus. He is the only One. Come to Jesus today; feel the need for the Saviour, feel that you cannot live without Him. Those who came to Jesus in chapter 4 said "we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (v 42). What can you do without Jesus? Can you live without Him? Do you feel you can get along in the world without Him? He died to save you, He shed His precious blood. He gave His life for sinners Christ died upon the tree. The outgoings of His heart are toward the sinner. He says, "Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest", Matt 11: 28. He is inviting persons, saying, Come to me. Jesus is saying that at the present time. How available He is! The reason why He can do this in righteous grace is because He took all our liabilities upon Himself and has established a basis before God on which He can call persons to come to Himself and be saved.

May we know what it is to experience the need for the Saviour, that we cannot get along without Him. The apostle Paul could say, "for me to live is Christ", Phil 1: 21. He was prepared to suffer the loss of everything else that he may gain Christ. I trust that is the language and the outgoing of heart of every one here. We need Jesus, we cannot do without Him. We feel the need of the Saviour, and constantly we feel the need of the Spirit being given His place in us, to guide us through this dark and barren scene. We need divine Persons to help us through; it is a dark uncharted course, but the Spirit is available, and Christ is available on high to help us and to guide us through this scene. Jesus is still available. May we just seize the opportunity to find the company of this great, glorious and precious Saviour, that He may be ours for time and for eternity, for His Name's sake.

ORMOND BEACH

10 May 1992

HOPEFUL CHILDREN

A young student, brought under the power of the word of God, told the preacher that he hoped he was saved, but if he had any difficulties could he come and see him. Next morning he called, saying that he could find no proof of being saved. The preacher pointed out that the student had not asked for a proof of his readiness to see him - why then should he look for a further token of God's readiness to bless him? What about the reader: do you take Him at His word that whosoever "believes on the Son has eternal life"?

According to the Scripture, the believer's hope is "an anchor of the soul, both secure and firm". In itself this anchor is as secure as the Person of the Lord Jesus who has entered in a glorious place.

Being firm means that we may draw or 'haul' upon the anchor to bring us in our affections nearer to where He is. Being our "Forerunner" means that Jesus has Himself hastened, as it were, to search out and prepare a place for His own people. What a blessing it is to be His own!

J.C.Evershed