

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 262

January 1995

Contents

BONDMANSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP
WORK

BONDMANSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP

Exodus 21: 1-6; Genesis 44: 18-34; 1 Samuel 25: 23-3; 2 Timothy 2: 24-26

R.D.P. I thought we might consider bondmanship and discipleship. The feature of bondmanship especially bears on us in the last days.

The Lord speaks in Revelation to His bondman John; in fact all the writers of the epistles take on the character of a bondman: Paul, Peter, Jude and James all refer to themselves in this way. It seems to me that it must have a very great bearing upon us in the last days, that these great servants took on such a character. Primarily, of course, as we read in Exodus typically, the Lord Jesus took on the feature of a bondman. I think we sometimes believe the thought of a bondman puts us under an obligation, but it is more than that; the bondman involves ownership, and I wonder if we need help as together. Everything today is so optional; people please themselves whether they do this or that, and consider that they can choose whether they take up this course or that course. That is not what belongs to the working out of Christianity. Christianity is not for persons who, you may say, voluntarily offer themselves for a short time; bondmanship involves 'for ever', it involves ownership not obligation. It is not only that I owe something to the Lord Jesus for what He has done for me, but that He has bought me. It says, "ye are not your own ... for ye have been bought with a price" (1 Cor 6: 19, 20); we belong to Him, we are His, at His disposal, and for His will.

Discipleship and bondmanship are very similar thoughts. When I was a boy I was often told that 'to know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to serve Him'. Now I believe that to know Him is discipleship, and to serve Him is bondmanship.

So I read these scriptures. The first one sets out typically the Lord Jesus as the Hebrew bondman. It is a beautiful scripture, setting out in its distinctiveness the wonderful character of the Lord Jesus. "I love my master, my wife, and my children" has coloured and distinguished the whole dispensation in the way in which He has moved. It comes in after the giving of the law. We have been taught that in chapter 19 we have what God had done - "borne you on

eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (v 4), and there is a positive response from the people. But when He sets out His covenant and how He will be with them in chapter 20, in the law, there is no response, no answer, and He immediately brings in, in chapter 21, this thought of the bondman, a Hebrew bondman, setting out the One who would fulfil it, and the way it would be carried through, typical of the Lord Jesus. One of the things that is going to help us is to see that it is love that impels the bondman; he does not do it because he thinks he ought to, he does it because he loves to, and that is the impelling power of bondmanship in Christianity as distinct from the bondman in the world's history. That is to be the motive power, beloved brethren, as we seek to work things out.

I read about the brethren of Joseph because they were acting like a collection of individuals with their own thoughts and their own ways, all diverse. But they are brought, through Joseph's dealings with them, to this point where love compels one of them, Judah, to take the place of a bondman. He says, in effect, I cannot see my father have more sorrow, I cannot see the brethren any more divided, I will take the place of a bondman to my lord, and it is at that point that Joseph makes himself known.

Then in Abigail we see one who typically is concerned to maintain the dignity and glory of the assembly position. Sometimes we think of maintaining assembly truth as a very lofty thing, and so it is, but practically may involve someone who is prepared to die that what there is of assembly quality and character may be maintained. Abigail takes the bondman's place, or as the scripture says, the bondmaid's place, in maintaining what there is by way of distinctiveness and glory in David. "Upon me, my lord, upon me let the iniquity fall" is her plea as she takes the bondmaid's place. Then there is the last few verses we read: "a bondman of the Lord ought not to contend, but ... apt to teach". I wonder what the bondman's teaching is. Then that lovely verse at the end where it says, "if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance". That is the atmosphere the bondman works in; he does not give up; he does not say that looking for recovery is a waste of time, or that any particular

avenue is closed. He is bound to the Lord, he is bound to Him in his service, he is bound to Him in relation to His interests, and he says, "if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance". Is that not a lovely verse? I think it sets out the hopefulness of the present day, and the atmosphere in which the bondman serves.

M.J.W. I wonder if a remark of Mr Darby's helps: 'Self likes to be served, but love delights to serve'. I feel for myself that I need to live more in love so that I am formed in it, and that my actions are the result of love. He could have thought that, the master having given me a wife, that will hold me now, because if I go out I am going to leave my wife behind; but that is not the viewpoint of love.

R.D.P. Now, that is right. It seems to me that we need help to see that the position of bondman is essential if we are to be able to be preserved and helped, and that the impelling power of the bondman is love. That is why discipleship comes first, because we are helped to love as we take on discipleship, because discipleship involves occupation with Christ.

M.J.W. It says "We love because He has first loved us", 1 John 4: 19, and I would have thought the love side must come first, and then discipleship would have involved the teaching and my committing myself to that, and following.

R.D.P. I think if we were occupied more with Him and followed Him more we would learn to love Him more. He gives very strong instruction in the gospels as to being His disciple; it is a very severe line, is it not? "If any man come to me, and shall not hate his own father and mother ... and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple", Luke 14: 26. He speaks there also about counting the cost. It seems to me that, in the Scriptures, the disciple is totally occupied with Christ; that is his occupation. The immediate bearing is teaching, as you say. But surely, if we were occupied with and come under the teaching of Christ and are in relation to Him, our love for Him must grow and we should become formed in love. I go back to what I quoted earlier: 'To know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to serve Him'.

J.McK. Does the bondman's form involve humility?

R.D.P. Yes. That is a lovely scripture in Philippians - "emptied himself, taking a bondman's form" (chap 2: 7). Who could speak rightly of such a scripture as that? It was not only that the Lord Jesus took a bondman's form in the way that He did things and the way in which He moved, but it was the mind that was in Him. He was marked by the mind and thought that went with what was seen. Do you think that is right?

J.McK. Yes. It has often been said that in Philippians 2 the likeness of men is dignity, but the bondman's form is humility, and I wondered if humility with us would result in enlarged affections because our hearts are drawn out by what is greater than we are.

R.D.P. That is a very helpful remark, that the likeness of men involves dignity. Adam as created and set in the garden was not made a bondman. The thought of bondmanship comes in later, and it must be a moral thought, because as sin has come in and worked its way, what is suited and appropriate is bondmanship. But Adam was not originally set up as a bondman. As you say, the likeness of men by nature involves dignity.

D.C.W. Why is it a Hebrew bondman? It would, in a certain sense, be a contradiction in terms. Normally the Hebrews would not be bondmen one of another.

R.D.P. That is helpful. The Lord Jesus had the most right and title of anyone not to take up this lowly service, but in devotion and love He took it up to serve in relation to His Master, His wife and His children.

That is the total area of the bondman's service, I think. You say more.

D.C.W. It is a perpetual commitment into which he enters; he is a bondman for ever.

R.D.P. That is just my exercise, that it is perpetual; it is not something that we can lay down. Our brother helped us at London recently when he said we are come too far now for things to fade out, or for me to stop; the spirit of the bondman goes on, he does not draw back. He cannot draw back because he does not belong to himself, he belongs someone else; he belongs to Christ. I do think that

something the younger ones and all of us might consider well is that, as persons who have been taken up by the Lord Jesus, who are the subjects of His precious work, we do not only have an obligation to Him, we are *owned* by Him. We are all His bondmen.

E.C.B. Is that why John writes the Revelation as a bondman, because in the failing and breaking circumstances in which Revelation is written, it is only the bondman who has come through?

R.D.P. Yes, that is helpful; say more about that, please.

E.C.B. I was struck by your drawing attention to it - "his bondman John"; everything is breaking up, it is the bondman who has gone through.

R.D.P. All the official side has failed, everything has gone on that line; it has not stood the test. But the bondman is there, and in his devotion he had nowhere else to go, he serves his Master, he is his Master's, and he serves until he dies. That is bondmanship, he is bought by Him. I do not think it fits in with the thinking of this modern world in which we are, that bondmanship involves that we belong to Him. "Ye have been bought with a price: glorify now then God in your body", 1 Cor 6: 20. I have no choice, to belong to Him.

E.C.B. I venture to say that that side of things needs to be stressed among us, because the tendency of the world is that everyone may please themselves; it can be incipiently among us. In John 6 the disciples went back, but a bondman survives until Revelation.

R.D.P. It is an interesting thing that the original thought of disciples became corrupted, became just a name, it became just a title of a group, and, as you say, some of the disciples went back and walked no more with Him, but the bondman goes on. Now, beloved brethren, if we are to answer to what I believe came into the meetings at London, there is a call, a rallying call to us. We have seen sorrow and breakdown of a kind we hoped and thought we would never see again, but, beloved brethren, if things are to go on, if we have come this far, then it is for each one of us to take up this line of bondmanship. As belonging to Him we have no option but to move in relation to His will.

D.A.B. The Lord speaks in John 13 of disciples "of mine". He might have just said 'My disciples', but He seems to emphasise the thought of ownership there. It says, "By this shall all know that ye are disciples of mine, if ye have love amongst yourselves" (v 35). He does not exactly say there love for one another, He had said that previously. I wondered if the idea of "love amongst yourselves" suggests that it was a spring and quickening power in the company.

R.D.P. I believe that is right; I think the stress you put on disciples of Mine shows that it is not nominal, it is not by profession, they belong to Him. I do think there is a close link between discipleship and bondmanship. Discipleship is in relationship to Himself alone; bondmanship is the way that the disciple serves in this day in which we are; but both of them are imperative, and love amongst yourselves is working. The bondman is toiling and working that things will not break down or fail; he will serve his Master and his Master's interests even if he must die in the doing of it.

S.D.K.R. Would it come out in perfection in the garden of Gethsemane? The Lord would not exert His own will although it involved His being made sin.

R.D.P. Yes, the garden of Gethsemane indicates pressure, as we have been helped to see. We are privileged to have the record of the Lord Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane in such pressure - "not my will but thine be done", Luke 22: 42. He took, as the hymn we sang (No 304) says, 'a bondman's place'. What wonderful things these are! The example is there in Himself, He took it on Himself.

R.T. The enjoyment of the relationship seems to be paramount in his mind, does it not? If he says distinctly, "I love my master, my wife, and my children", he would rather suffer himself in order to enjoy those relationships than have his own freedom.

R.D.P. I think that is right; his wife and his children did not belong to him, they belonged to his master, but such was the value of those relationships that he would serve for ever to enjoy them. Think of what it would mean to them to watch him go to the door and see his ear being pierced with an awl, and so taking on bondmanship for

ever. Now I think, as we know what discipleship is, we shall more and more appreciate the detail of all His love for us and all His love for God. They would have watched him as his ear was bored with an awl; he became not their bondman but his bondman for ever. I think what you say is fine, love impels him. Love is the power in Romans 6 where in effect he says, I have used these hands, these eyes, these feet, as in bondage to sin, but such is the effect of love experienced through the gospel that I will yield them in bondage to righteousness. It is love that is the impelling power,

P.M. In the previous chapter in Exodus there is this list of “Thou shalt not”, but do the two words “I will” supersede all that was set out in the previous chapter? There was no limit to that, was there?

R.D.P. I think that is very fine. We could not take these words “bondman for ever” too literally and fix them upon the Lord because of the inscrutableness of who He is. In character surely He took on this form, but when He says, “I love”, that is for ever. That does not change, does it? As we have often been taught, it is one love here, not three different loves; it is the same love.

E.C.B. In regard to what has just been said, love is the fulfilling of the law, which would bridge the two chapters.

R.D.P. Yes, that is very good. The covenant, the means by which God would be with them, is spelt out in the previous chapter, and He puts everything to their advantage. He sets out the law, the covenant, as the basis on which He would be with them, and then He says at the end, “in all places where I shall make my name to be remembered, I will come unto thee, and bless thee” (v 24). You may say He gives them every advantage but there is no response in chapter 20. Then immediately He brings in the teaching of the Hebrew bondman, as if to show that the only way in which it would be fulfilled is in the precious One who would take on this character, fulfil the law and make it honourable. Now that is another thing: He made it honourable. I believe that in the way that He moved, the way that He lived, He not only fulfilled the law, it became honourable and shone out in the life of Jesus.

D.E.B. The Lord brings out in Matthew's gospel the distinction between the disciple and the bondman, does He not? "The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the bondman above his lord. It is sufficient for the disciple that he should become as his teacher, and the bondman as his lord", chap 10: 24,25. You have those two relationships of "teacher" and "lord".

R.D.P. I think it is helpful; I had thought of that scripture; it brings in teaching and lordship involving the way that he serves in relation to him. It is not two persons, but one side is in relation to himself, and the other what I can do for him or his interests.

R.W.F. In connection with the failure of Israel to answer to the law, I suppose we could understand that the law from the outset looked on to Christ as the only One who could answer to it. He magnified the law and made it honourable, as you said; in a sense He ornamented it, He showed the true glory of it.

R.D.P. That is fine, He ornamented it. Think of that! The Pharisees took up the law but they did not make it honourable, did they? They took up the law in great detail but they did not make it honourable.

The Lord Jesus fulfilled the law. You would hardly know He was fulfilling the law and yet it was fulfilled in Him. Honour came out of the life of Jesus, and the Hebrew bondman takes on a certain honour and glory because of the way and the character in which he served.

R.T. There seems to be a public demonstration of his committal in the ear being bored through with the awl at the door, would you say? Wherever he went he showed that he belonged to that master only.

R.D.P. Yes, the whole section is distinct. I believe it is time we became more distinct, and I speak for myself in that. It is very easy for things with each one of us to become indistinct. Let us take up what has been said, that we have come too far now to let the enemy get any further advantage with us. If things are to be maintained it will not be just because I hope they will be, it will be because **we are with God and take up His service on this basis, and start speaking and moving distinctly.**

J.McK. So it is the master himself who bores the ear through. This is not simply a ceremony; this is the establishing of the direct link, is it not, between man and his master? That would give distinction, would it not?

R.D.P. Think of what this must mean to the master. He had witnessed the bondman's service, and you get the impression here that he would have gladly given him his liberty, but he sees this expression of love and it is the master who takes the awl and bores his ear through with an awl; and he shall be is bondman for ever. It is a very affecting thing, because I believe the link between bondman and master reaches a point, you may say, where, as the Lord says, "I call you no longer bondman ... but I have called you friends", John 15: 15. Even in history, in the link between master and bondman, there came in at times a link in friendship, persons became so loyal, so devoted, that they became a friend, and yet they were still a bondman. I think what you say is right, there would be a special link formed here.

D.C.W. So he would become wholly identified with the house and the household. The door and the doorpost would bring that out, would it not?

R.D.P. Yes, I think it is an interesting subject why these illustrations are used, the door or the doorpost, but, as you say, it is related to the house. It is not a wide-ranging thing here but close devoted service.

D.C.W. So he might have felt certain restrictions, yet he was happy in the environment to which he had committed himself.

R.D.P. Yes, bondmanship does involve restriction, and the wife and the children were also in that relationship, but things are to be worked out in that. The Lord Jesus came into an area that involved restriction, and I think bondmanship with us will involve that too.

R.T. Bondmen do not require any formal qualifications, and yet they are able to do anything that needs to be done.

R.D.P. Is that not fine? So in the scripture in Timothy you find that the bondman is apt to teach. What is the bondman's teaching like? Some of the older brothers and sisters here have sought all their

lives to be on this line; there is a teaching connected with that. I like the thought of the bondman's teaching - "apt to teach". He becomes someone who can take on anything, he is not a specialist.

E.C.B. Do you think that bondmanship in its finest form must involve identity of mind?

R.D.P. Yes, go on.

E.C.B. "I am come ... not that I should do my will, but the will of him that has sent me", John 6: 38. If we think of bondmanship in connection with Jesus, He was the expression of the Father's will. I wondered in regard to your reference in 2 Timothy 2 whether, in relation to what you said before, a bondman there has gone round the circle. He began as a disciple, become a bondman, now he is a teacher, but he teaches because he is of one mind with his master.

R.D.P. Yes, I think so. So that the mind is brought in in Philippians: "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus", chap 2: 5. It seems to involve the mind. It has been suggested that discipleship more involves our spirits, but bondmanship involves the mind; there is a definiteness of mind and a closeness and unity of mind and thinking.

J.McK. He does not allow himself to be taken out of the position of bondman either, does he? I was looking at Revelation 19 where John falls before the angel doing homage, and the word immediately is, "See thou do it not. I am thy fellow-bondman, and the fellow-bondman of thy brethren who have the testimony of Jesus" (v 10). I wondered if we would be secure in not leaving the position of bondman, not allowing ourselves to be promoted out of it, if you understand me.

R.D.P. Yes. I am sure what you say is right and helpful. If you take up the profession of Christianity you are really His bondman. That is the position you are in, He has bought you, He owns you, and as you say, for our part we will not let it go. The angel would not be promoted. That is something the enemy would use, perhaps if you preach a little, or you serve in a meeting like this, he would try and move you from being a bondman, but the word is "See thou do it not".

R.T. Paul says to Corinth, I have served you as bondman for Jesus' sake (see 2 Cor 4: 5).

R.D.P. Very good, he served as a bondman at Corinth, and he loved them so much that he was tested as to the truth he brought in there.

The faithfulness, so essential of the first epistle, to Corinth caused him such grief and anxiety that in the second epistle he says I almost wished I had not written it to you. But he rejoiced that they were grieved to repentance (see 2 Cor 7: 9). That is the bondman, I think. He felt the weight and burden of what was involved but he serves his Master.

E.C.B. Would you say also that the bondman has no intermediate master? If we think of houses where there used to be servants, there was one over this grade of servants and someone else over them and so on, but the servant has no intermediate master, not even the brethren.

R.D.P. That is right. He gives to his bondmen the authority (see Mark 13: 34). He does not give it to a hierarchy. In the religious systems around, the authority is held at certain levels and delegated down, and all kinds of wrong decisions emanate from that. The authority of God in relation to the present day is given to His bondman, it is not given to a hierarchy. Does that confirm what you say?

E.C.B. Yes; if you refer to the established church there is a hierarchy from top to bottom, and women are getting into this too. I think it is very important to keep in mind that the bondman of the Lord comes under no other authority or influence than that of his Lord.

R.D.P. That is right, and is a very important principle; he serves in relation to his Lord alone.

D.A.B. Do you think we are really in a position of sons and daughters here?

R.D.P. Go on, please.

D.A.B. We might reckon, What do we have apart from the faithful committal of another? If we think of the Lord Jesus, we owe Him

everything, because He took this place. We might also think of how we came to be in the circle where we are through the faithfulness of others, is it not? We can see the awl marks in the door of the position in which we are where others had made committals, and these sons and daughters owed their very existence to a kind of committal, did they not?

R.D.P. Yes. Very fine, and that perhaps brings us to Genesis because that is what they found as they came to Joseph's house.

Judah finally says he will serve as "a bondman to my lord", he puts himself in that situation with Joseph. I am sure that he found that his life was a much better life afterwards. He found that even the food supply, his accommodation, everything, was far better as he took on that situation of a bondman. We shall find, as taking up this service, that He will look after us far better than we can look after ourselves.

That has been said before, but in some measure I think we will prove it is true for ourselves.

D.C.W. If we look on to 1 Chronicles 5 we can see that: "for Judah prevailed among his brethren, and of him was the prince" (v 2). So bondmanship does not necessarily mean indignity of any sort, in fact it is a very dignified situation, is it not?

R.D.P. Yes, I believe so. You do not set out to be dignified, but in taking up that service, dignity will be seen in it.

D.C.W. So did he prove he had the moral qualifications for it on the kingly line?

R.D.P. Yes. In Genesis we have a practical illustration of the value of taking the bondman's place. These brothers acted as individuals, they did not have regard or respect for their father or for one another. It has often been said that they were the product of several mothers, one father but several mothers, and I suppose to some extent that is true of us as to our histories, is it not? We have brethren here who remember the opening up of the truth in the first half of this century; we have persons like myself who came into fellowship at a time, perhaps 30 years ago, when the stability of that earlier period was gone and a different teaching came in which has had to be judged in

its content and spirit. And we have young people who have come in after both of these periods; in a certain way it is like different mothers, and that can lead to different views, different thoughts and individual ideas as to the truth. For instance, the older brethren must get quite frustrated with some of us, because the way we talk and think and act was not the way it was in the day when they were younger, and the younger people now may be frustrated with all of us. Now, beloved brethren, how can we work together so that the brotherhood may be preserved? How can we work together so that we can be preserved in unity in relation to Christ? I think it is as taking on, not bondmanship in relation to one another, but bondmen to Christ.

R.T. So that Judah sees something that was normal between Benjamin and his father, and he loved that so much that he would sacrifice these other individualities.

R.D.P. God had brought him through His governmental ways by a hard way; he had lost some of his family and he saw love now as he had not seen it before, and he says I am going to preserve it. Now that is the brother. We need that, beloved brethren. We have seen much suffering; young people here have realised perhaps for the first time what it is to lose their brethren and they have felt it; we need to recognise that. But the answer to that is for us not to be diverted and to take up this service as bondmen to Christ, and that will help us in relation to the way we work things out together, as we are right in relation to Him.

S.D.K.R. I was thinking of the first words of the passage: "Then Judah came near to him, and said, Ah! my lord". As you were saying, we get on kingdom lines, and kingdom-mindedness would help us as to assembly-mindedness.

R.D.P. Yes, I think so. So Judah had had his part with the rest in their cruel act as to Joseph and their father; they had very little consideration for their father. There they were a collection of individuals. We are not to be that, beloved brethren. That is perhaps the product of the days that we have come through, but here is a man who is brought to the way that Joseph works, so he says, Ah! my lord do not let it happen any more. It is the spirit of a bondman, he would

take it on; he says, "let thy servant stay ... a bondman to my lord". That is the spirit that will hold the brethren and bring about preservation.

R.W.F. Do you think it would be too much to say that the discipline through which the Lord has passed us has been to the end that we might be better bondmen?

R.D.P. You are referring to Joseph's service with his brethren here. I am sure you are right. He was always seeking them. With all their faults and weaknesses, and despite their cruelty, he never stopped seeking them. The Lord is going to work and toil with us, He is going to use our circumstances and hedge us about. It almost seems that the famine came in just to recover these brothers. Maybe God is doing that; perhaps all these things we read of in the newspapers are allowed so that we might be helped as to what He is doing; perhaps the fear that is in the minds of men around as to what is happening in the world is so that we might learn to love one another and appreciate what is vital at this present time. It seems later that was the effect of the famine in Jacob's day.

R.W.F. We have to do with the One who can see through the circumstances - "Did ye not know that such a man as I can certainly divine?" (v 15).

R.D.P. Very fine! Then, when it is all over, he says, "be not angry with yourselves ... God sent me before you to preserve life", chap 45: 5. That reminds us of our Lord Jesus, does it not?

D.C.W. He sent them off with an admonitory word in the next chapter, did he not? - "Do not quarrel on the way" (v 24).

R.D P. Well, how often we revert to what we are naturally; some of us like to be dominant and others are quiet, do not say a lot. Joseph says, "Do not quarrel on the way". Keep at it, keep working at it, maintain this spirit and attitude of mind.

D.E.B. There is a side, is there not, in which we need to be subject to one another? Everything is not direct relationship with the Lord; that side obviously is prime and predominant and we never let it go, but

we cannot just be independent and promoting our own points of view, can we?

R.D.P. So, if we take on bondmanship to Him we shall be helped in relation to all things, we shall be helped as to one another. Your brother may not always be in the gain and good of a thing and you would work with him, you would have patience with him. If I make way for my brother he will make way for me, and so we shall show that we are right in relation to Christ. We shall find that as this is true, things will become honourable with us.

J.McK. What he says about Benjamin is beautiful - "let the lad go up with his brethren", as if bondmanship in Judah is going to result in the release of Benjamin, and in moral relationships. We have often said that Benjamin was not involved in the failure. There are young people among us who have not seen the history we have seen, but there is more than that, that is the release, the experience of normal Christianity.

R.D.P. That is good. We usually refer to Benjamin as the overcomer, but I do not see Benjamin as the overcomer here; here he is a young defenceless lad, and Judah says, as it were, let him go up with his brethren, I am not going to see the boy suffer when there is something that I can do that will maintain that love link between him and his father.

R.T. It is the bondman who is the overcomer here, is it not?

R.D.P. Yes, that is good.

C.J.G.B. You referred at the beginning to Jude. Is it very affecting how he opens his epistle as being a bondman of Jesus Christ, then goes on to the called ones beloved in God the Father, preserved in Jesus Christ: "Mercy to you, and peace, and love be multiplied". Is there depth in the sense of mercy and the value of the calling, and the dignity of pursuing, multiplying love?

R.D.P. I think that is right. All these writers in some way took on this service of bondman and it is reflected in the way they worked and were ready to toil. Paul goes so far as to say, I travail again in birth in relation to the Galatians. How far these men would go because they

were serving such a Master, and anything that belonged to Him they would die to secure it for Him.

E.C.B. So far as the scripture goes, Judah never became a bondman; he was absorbed into the household and the blessing with the brethren.

R.D.P. Yes, I think that is right. He was ready to take it on; as far as the record goes he resumed his life, you may say, in a better land and in better circumstances with better food and better company. He resumed it without all the worries and the guilt of unjudged sin upon him; he resumed it in relation to Christ, and that is something we shall prove too.

E.C.B. So the door or the doorpost implies that there is something better than the wilderness and more permanent.

R.D.P. Yes, that is good, it was the way into the house; he would serve in relation to the house.

Rem. It is also the place where the blood of the pascal lamb was. I was thinking of Romans: "I beseech you ... by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice", chap 12: 1. He presented his body, did he not?

R.D.P. That is good. It is a similar idea, the blood was on the lintel and the doorpost. The scripture in Samuel is one that we usually describe as the church militant, and I suppose that would be right. Abigail comes forward representative of the assembly in that way as one who does not want David to fall below the dignity and glory of his position: but what she does is in this spirit of bondmanship - or the bondmaid as she describes herself - she would serve in this way so that disaster might not happen. Beloved brethren, can we do that?

David was going to an extreme here. How many times we have seen things taken to extremes amongst the brethren, and whenever that happens people die because of it, die as far as the fellowship is concerned, and die many times as far as the testimony is concerned. David girds on his sword with the intent of slaying all Naboth's men. He was not right in that. Now Abigail is going to maintain the dignity and glory of the position. We do need to maintain that, beloved

brethren. She comes and brings the food, and says, if there is any iniquity, let it fall on me. She reminds David that "My lord fights the battles of Jehovah". I think this is the spirit of a bondmaid or a bondman.

P.M. She already had an appreciation of what Jehovah had done - "Jehovah has restrained thee from coming with bloodshed".

R.D.P. Very good. Think of that! What a thing, beloved brethren, if we could be an influence for restraint like that! It is so easy to inflame matters and so often add a little to what we hear. She says, in effect, I must intervene, I must go there, I must take the food, I must take the iniquity, I must take the burden, I must stop the loss. These are very fine things; that is the spirit of a bondman, beloved brethren, and I believe that is what we need to take up.

D.A.B. The young people must be assured, must they not, that there is this element available to them? When the young men heard what David was doing, they might have fallen to talk among themselves - those of us who are younger tend to do that when we do not know what to do - but they went to Abigail. They might have thought, Why talk to Abigail about an armed attack of this kind, but they seemed to be confident that she would know what to do.

R.D.P. Very good; they put it in the right place. We need to work hard, all of us, to fight this temptation to extend what often proves to be untrue reports and that kind of thing. We need to resist that, put it where it belongs, not where some who will make an extreme out of it, but where someone will come in with the spirit of Christ to serve as a bondman, who will die if necessary to preserve and save the distinctiveness of what is for Christ. That is just my simple thought as to this.

A.J.E.T. The greatness of what God is doing puts all else in place, does it not? I was thinking of the first part of verse 28: "I pray thee, forgive the transgression of thy handmaid: for Jehovah will certainly make my lord a lasting house". That greatness means that in her view anything she is doing can be left and she proceeds with what God is doing, "bound in the bundle of the living".

R.D.P. Very fine! Her plea is that if anything I have done or said is a transgression, forgive the transgression, but "Jehovah will certainly make my lord a lasting house". We have these things, beloved brethren, the bundle of the living, the lasting house, the battles of Jehovah: these are glorious things, not occupied with gossip or mere exchanges of letters but the battles of Jehovah, the bundle of the living, that is what we are to be about, that is what the bondman is serving in relation to.

S.D.K.R. Would you say a little more about dignity? Is that something that Satan would be against? This matter is a test today, I think. We are to be thinking about the dignity of the assembly.

R.D.P. Well, I believe that if I set out to be a dignified person I shall fail, I shall come over as something else. I believe dignity comes from taking up a right position in relation to God, in relation to Christ and in relation to one another. Seeking to fill out those positions and situations as I am able according to His will and with His help, I believe dignity will come out in them, and dignity can come out in the lowliest service.

D.C.W. It would be a concern too about the reputation of the Lord and of the testimony. That is what comes out at the end of the chapter, is it not? - concern that there be no slur left on David's character, what may take place in the future.

R.D.P. Yes, nothing left that would mar or harm or hinder. What a fine thing that is, and she says, If needs be I will bear the iniquity. That is Abigail, and if that is the church militant, then it is a very attractive lowly way.

E.C.B. Abigail later in the chapter is in John 13, is she not?

R.D.P. Yes, you had better explain that.

E.C.B. Well, it is on the face of the scripture, a bondman to wash the feet of my Lord, and then when David takes her as his wife she finds "part with me".

R.D.P. Yes, very good. John 13 helps us in being maintained in how to serve one another, but it also helps us to maintain in our thoughts

the distinctiveness of Christ. He rises from that service and He takes His garments. The Lord Jesus not only serves as a bondman; He serves in the dignity of priesthood for instance; He serves as Minister of the sanctuary; these are all part of His service, but He takes up this lowly service as a bondman to serve His own .

J.McK. So that although Abigail is the instrument, she brings the supplies, she does the speaking, what she says is that it is Jehovah that has restrained David, and David comes to the same conclusion, he says, "as Jehovah the God of Israel liveth, who has restrained me", God did it, even though it was Abigail who was evident in the action.

R.D.P. Very fine! All that is left behind at the end of it is that God has preserved, God has saved and God has restrained. That is the service of a bondman; nothing to Abigail, just this record in Scripture to help us, otherwise there would be no record there, because history amongst the people of God must have contained many instances of his kind of thing ; there is no record of it, but the glory has been for Him.

I just leave the brethren with that thought in 2 Timothy, a bondman ought not to contend but he is to be apt to teach; it comes out of experience. There is something coming out in the way some body is serving in relation to Christ, in lowly service, devoted service, not pressing their own views but apt to teach. There is teaching in that. Then "if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance".

Think of all our beloved brethren that we have lost, beloved brethren; the bondman of the Lord is serving in relation to them, and he is not just casually thinking of them but if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance. That is the bondman's attitude and spirit at the present time and it well behoves us to take it on.

E.C.B. We have left a lot out of 2 Timothy 2 by concentrating on verse 19.

R.D.P. Yes, what flows out of the earlier part of the chapter is not a mean-minded person but a person who would serve and toil for Christ with a view to a full result for Him.

SUNBURY

16 April 1994

Key to initials

C.J.G.Brodie, Ealing; D.A.Burr, London; D.E.Burr, Redbridge;
E.C.Burr, London; R.W.Flowerdew, Sunbury; J.McKay, Woodstock;
P.Martin, Colchester; R.D.Plant, Birmingham; S.D.K.Roberts,
Croydon; A.J.E.Temple, Sunbury; R.Taylor, Barnet; D.C.White,
Londonderry; M.J.Welch, Sunbury

WORK

Ron Plant

Mark 13: 31-36; Nehemiah 4: 7-11, 21; Haggai 1: 3-9; Acts 15: 36-41; 16: 1-3

The hymn that we began with (No.367) I am sure contains words that touch the heart of all of us here:

'I am not told to labour
To put away my sin;'

It is part of the very basis, beloved brethren, of our blessing. Nothing we could do, nothing we could achieve, nothing we could offer, could ever give us a standing and place before God. Nothing in my history, nothing in my abilities, could mend, bridge or remove the distance that sin had brought in.

'So foolish, weak, and helpless,
I never could begin'.

I suppose all of us here know the stirring of conscience within, and have realised the helplessness of man away from God as to his condition and not able to lift a hand to help yourself,

'But blessed truth - I know it –
Though ruined by the fall,
Christ for my soul hath suffered,
Yes, Christ has done it all!'

Wonderful, precious truth! Nothing I could ever do, even as a believer, be I the most thankful, the most spiritual person, will ever give me a greater place before God than I have in His purpose. In His sovereign mercy I am secured for ever, through the work of Jesus, for time and for eternity, with nothing that I have contributed; everything because of what Jesus has done, 'Yes, Christ has done it all!'

What I wanted to speak about was work, but first I thought we should start with this vital truth, that my eternal salvation and my standing before God is entirely and wholly based on the work of

Another. It is a precious thing that when God sees me He sees Christ. How thankful we can be for that because some days we may be up and some days down. Some years of our lives have been very dull spiritually and perhaps there may be persons here who are thankful this afternoon that they are not at this moment having to stand before God in their own faithfulness. Though we may fail on the line of faithfulness He abides faithful. What a wonderful thing! I am secured for ever beloved brethren.

Yet I wanted to speak about work, because as persons who have been secured in such a way, who appreciate what it is to be taken up in so reign mercy by God through our Lord Jesus Christ, surely we would then seek to be here in His testimony and for His pleasure, and this involves that we take up His work. So I refer to this first scripture which we referred to earlier: "having ... given to his bondmen the authority and to each one his work". It refers to His absence - "for ye do not know when the time is: it is as a man gone out of the country, having left his house and given to his bondmen the authority". The authority is not given to a hierarchy, the authority is not given to a clergy, it is not given to persons, we may say, who are able by study or application to receive a position or an ordination from men. The scripture does not say He has put the authority there, He gives to His bondmen the authority. Every one of us here, we may say, is to come into that category of the bondman. So there is authority from God "and to each one his work". That is what I wanted to speak about. Work is not something to be ashamed of, we need to work. I make a plea to the brethren, to all of us, young and old, that we might work and work hard at the present time; that we might seek to be with God in what He is doing, to sow and to toil and to work in relation to the things that are precious to Him with all the strength we have. Whatever you find to do, you do it. "To each one his work": that means everyone in this room, all of us; every one has something to do, every one has been given a measure of faith.

Some of us are good at starting jobs and not finishing them; and even starting them is not so easy sometimes. But it is a great thing if we can take in this thought of working amongst the saints. The Lord

says, 'The fields are white to harvest but the workmen are few', (see Luke 10: 2, John 4: 35). That is true today. Some things in the Scriptures are said to be few, workmen is one of them. "The workmen are few" (Matt. 9:37) are the Lord's own words. Another thing that is few, according to Paul, is fathers - "not many fathers", 1 Cor 4: 15. But to work, to take up something and not lay it down - that is the thing. You do not take something up and then lay it down again, as Mr Carter's poem speaks of taking up his cross:

'Nor let me lay it down;
Thy work in me complete:
Then for the cross give me the crown,
To cast before Thy feet'.

That would be a right exercise. I remember once serving at a meeting like this and feeling that perhaps it was a poor service rendered, and expressing this thought to someone who said to me, 'Never mind what you feel, do the work'. Let us do the work, that is an important word for us. Sometimes you younger men may preach and you may feel you are struggling a bit; and perhaps think you should not preach any more. You do the work. You may try to do something amongst God's people and feel you are not getting any appreciation for it, and sometimes you will not. But do the work, because you are doing it for Him. That is a most important thing, beloved. There is a great deal to be done at the present time, beloved brethren; "to each one his work": that we can all take up. We are not all the same, we are not all able to express ourselves very well perhaps, but there is something we all can do, and thank God, there is much that the saints can do. But sometimes you just feel disheartened and discouraged. I would like to encourage all here today to take up the work and not to lay it down. It is all to be for Christ.

I read these three other scriptures because they all represented times when the work had begun and stopped, and I wanted to use them just to encourage us to carry on with it, not to look for glamorous things or for great feats, not to seek great exploits, but the work is to be done. There are things to be done amongst the saints,

one and another to be encouraged, and there is teaching and all sorts of practical things to be done. There are things to be done for the Master.

Nehemiah is a very fine book; we have often used it before. It speaks about a day like ours, a day of recovery. As we have been taught, it relates mainly to what is external. The book of Ezra, which comes before this, speaks of when the people came back from Babylon and captivity and built the altar at Jerusalem. They were moved in their affections to come back, and they rebuilt the altar amongst the ruins. Then Nehemiah comes later and he builds the wall of the city. I wonder, beloved brethren, if we are all occupied in that. In a certain way the experience of rebuilding this wall is known over and over again, as the practical exercises of fellowship are experienced amongst the saints. Nehemiah was a man who, in his job as the king's cup-bearer, became aware of the sadness of the situation at Jerusalem, the ruin and the breakdown that had come in. And the king said, "Why is thy face sad ...?", Neh 2: 2. It was the first time, he said, that he had ever been sad in his presence. Now there comes with all of us a first time in our history when we experience real sadness at what enters into the public history of the church. Perhaps with some this is a time like that. Nehemiah had an experience like that. Do not let it just stay as that but see what you find in a man like Nehemiah who set himself in relation to his God to go and rebuild those walls, to go and do something as to the ruin of and shame of Jerusalem, and he goes - you will remember in the history - he goes and sees for himself. It is not something you pick up exactly by talking about it to others. He goes and sees for himself, and he arrives on his beast and goes around the ruins until he comes to a place where it is said, "there was no place for the beast under me to pass" (Neh 2: 14). How sad, beloved brethren, the awful breakdown in Christendom. How sad the breakdown amongst brethren. There are places today where we cannot pass.

There are places in the ruins where we cannot go, there are persons whom we know and love, whom we have broken bread with, and yet we have no access to them. There are situations where the

link that we have in the Spirit is interrupted. Nehemiah went round the broken walls of Jerusalem, and he felt that he had come to that point. Oh, beloved brethren, would to God that we could yet see an end to the sorrow that there is no place to pass. I wonder what God will yet do in this day in which we are. We have seen recovery of some of our beloved brethren, we thank God for it; I would love to see them all, I am sure we all would. Nehemiah was a man like that. He was going to toil and work despite all kinds of things that come in to discourage them to rebuild the wall. Others had gone with him; they may speak of believers walking here at the present time in fellowship together in relation to the Lord Jesus, and working at the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. It is not exploits but being willing to take up any kind of work. Here even the goldsmiths were building the wall, all these people were building together. Some of them had so much heart and love for it they built two pieces: think of that! (see chap 3: 19,21,24). I wonder if you could do that, beloved, build another piece. Some of our older brethren have been around a long time; they have built a piece but now they are building another piece. I remember some of the older brethren here when I was just a boy; these brethren were building their piece, and now they are building another piece. That is very fine. And there were those outside in Nehemiah's day who were mocking them. Do not let mockery stop you building the wall. You may remember they said, even if a fox went up it would knock it down. People have said that, they have said it even about the brethren in my day, 'It will not last, just give it a few years and it will be gone'. Well, it is through no merit of ours that everything has not gone, beloved brethren, no merit of ours, but the Lord has been very good to His people. Perhaps the voices of the mockers have stopped for the present time; they brought in hindrances here so that the people's strength was sapped, and so on. In another place there was an attack from within because in chapter 5 they started to make money out of their brethren.

Sometimes the attacks come from within, not from without. The enemy would use that to stop the work. Then they said, Come down to the plain of Ono and let us talk it out down there (see chap 6: 2).

Come down to a lower level and let us talk about things and we can

resolve them. Then finally they said what they were doing was rebellion, and so on. All these things the devil will use to stop the work. But they went on in perseverance and faithfulness - that is what marks the Book of Nehemiah - perseverance.

I refer particularly to this point where such was the attack of the enemy from without when they were working, seeking to complete the wall, that the people said, "The strength of the bearers of burdens faileth, and there is much rubbish". The work had stopped because the rubbish was not being cleared away. It is a very important thing, beloved brethren, if the work is to go on that the rubbish is cleared away. We often go round our cities and places and see examples where the rubbish is left; and sometimes in a spiritual sense rubbish is left. If the work is to continue, if we are to be helped in the work, clear the rubbish away, beloved, get it out of the way. The enemy has done his work if by occupying us with problems, difficulties, hindrances amongst the brethren, all this kind of things, the work has stopped. But Nehemiah is not satisfied with that. He arranges for them to have their sword and their trowel - you know the history - and through perseverance the work goes on. Let it go on, beloved brethren! I read that verse - lovely is it not? - "And we laboured in the work ... from the rising of the dawn till the stars appeared". May we be helped in that, beloved brethren, to carry on working. You may say, 'It is not very glamorous in our place, just a few of us and it is hard work sometimes. Sometimes we do not understand all the Scriptures and sometimes we have difficulty with the interpretation'. Do the work, beloved brethren, keep on working, keep on toiling amongst the saints. Young people, keep working at it, keep seeking to work in relation to what is precious to God. You will find there is a great blessing in it.

I read in Haggai, which again is a well known scripture. It seems from the history that they had started to build the house and then the work had stopped, and it may be according to the books, it had stopped for fifteen years. They had started to live in their own things, to build their own lives, their own interests, all of which had superseded what was precious. The prophet here indicates what the

people said: "The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built". They had come back from the captivity and were building His house, but it was very small relatively compared to the glory of what had been there before. Jehovah says, "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former" (Hag 2: 9), but in the first chapter they looked at what they were doing, and would recall the times when things were more glorious in Israel's history; they would have looked at it and thought, how sad it all is. I believe one of the reasons the work had stopped here, beloved brethren, was a lack of vision. Scripture says "Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint", Prov 29: 18. There is a great need for vision amongst the saints, a great need for vision. There is a need for you to lift your eyes and thoughts away from the smallness of the surroundings and try and get some impression of the vastness of what God is doing. There is not one thing that God has begun where there will not be a full answer to Himself, not one thing. There is not one person in whom the Spirit has begun His word where it will not be completed in its glory. I would that I had more vision. Do you have that, beloved? Ask God to help you to have vision as amongst His people. "Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint", you will seek your life in other things. I wonder if Christ is everything to us. I would that I knew more about total occupation with Christ.

We were having at meetings in London, "to know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings", Phil. 3: 10. The outlook of Paul's life was the greatness of Christ, he was totally absorbed with the greatness of Christ. Would that there was more vision with us, beloved. I love to read those Old Testament scriptures and glimpse the glory of what God was doing amongst His people. They were a people that God identified Himself with, and every day in the wilderness there was the pillar of cloud above them, the divine presence was there, and as the darkness fell, the pillar of fire by night. Think of those things! In the New Testament Paul says they had the promises, God was with them, identified with them. And now we have the divine commitment to what is coming to light in this dispensation; with the formation of one family in this day in which we are. I think we may be short of vision. These people here had

lost vision, I am sure they had, and it says, "Consider your ways". Is there anyone here dissatisfied with their life spiritually? "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but are not satisfied; ye drink, but are not filled with drink; ye clothe yourselves, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages for a bag with holes". It is very descriptive, is it not, of a dissatisfied life? Perhaps it is time for us to consider our ways, to ask ourselves where are we going, what are we doing? Where is my life spiritually? Where am I in relation to Christ? How much time do I spend in relation to Him? I doubt whether some of us go as far even as Jacob who offered God ten per cent, beloved brethren. I think many of us would be very challenged by ten per cent for God; ten percent of your time, two and a half hours a day; ten per cent of your affections. Well, these are very real things, are they not? "Consider your ways". The time had come that the work was to go on in God's house. The remarkable thing here, as is often said, is that within less than a month they were all working again. Oh, beloved, what a thing it would be if you and I were back in the work inside month. They were working again and were going the mountain to get the wood, getting material, something that is like Christ, bringing it in and building it into the house. It means you need to go uphill. It is not easy to go uphill. You may say it is difficult to get things moving in our localities. Young people here, it is time for us to take our full part in it. Our careers are important, many things are important, but put everything into the house of God, do that first. I am making a plea today, you understand, beloved brethren, I am making a plea that we do not, through a lack of being ready to work, let things, as far as we are concerned, slip away. Do not let it happen, beloved brethren. Young people, you do your part, take up your place in your local meeting, and though what you can do may seem small to you, it is precious to Christ. Put your strength in in relation to it and see how it fits in the great pattern of what He is doing and work and work and work that there might be more for Christ in our places. This is a simple word, I realise that, but I think it is a day for work, a day for workmen. Timothy says, "a workman that has not to be ashamed, cutting in a straight line the word of truth", 2 Tim 2: 15. It may sound simple but

actually it is very difficult to cut a straight line, but it gives some idea of a workman not to be ashamed. Lay it all out before the Lord, tell Him what you have tried to do. The Lord prophetically says, "I am a tiller of the ground", Zech 13: 5. Mr Darby used those words, did he not? He made nothing of himself and yet he worked and toiled for all those years, all those books, all those writings, the hymns, the travels, all those things. We are not all able for that but what a thing, to take up the work and not to lay it down. Paul at the end of his life says, "For I am already being poured out, and the time of my release is come". He had a sense that he had finished the race.

So finally in Acts, "Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return now and visit the brethren in every city where we have announced the word of the Lord ... And Barnabas proposed to take with them John also, called Mark; but Paul thought it not well to take with them him who had abandoned them, going back from Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work". What a thing that was! How much sorrow it brought in. It brought in a parting of the ways here between Paul and Barnabas, it resulted in the loss to the testimony for the time being of a very valuable man, Barnabas, a good man. He was recovered later, we are thankful for at, but it says of John Mark that he "had abandoned the, going back from Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work". Well, I just leave that with the brethren. We might perhaps think about that. He had not given up Christ, he had not in the gospel, he had not given up the preciousness, you may say, of what he held, but he went back from the work. It was hard, and here Paul was going to encourage the saints, he was, he going to see how they were getting on and that is something we all can take up. Let us not, any one of us beloved brethren, go back from the work, but let us take that word in the gospel that I first read, "to each one his work". We have it. Let us consider our ways and see if there is anything that we need to attend to in relation to working for Christ in the present time. For His Name's sake.

SUNBURY

16 April 1994