

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

AN ETERNAL ATMOSPHERE

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

PREPARATION

AN ETERNAL ATMOSPHERE

Zephaniah 3: 16,17; Revelation 21: 9-14; 1 Corinthians 13: 8-10

P.M. I thought these passages might help us to get an impression of the atmosphere that will mark eternity, a scene in which God will rest in His love. It must be that the love of God will pervade eternity, not only for man's blessing but for God's pleasure. Everything will be in keeping with it, His righteousness having involved that the whole moral issue should be resolved and met forever, and in the setting in which we are reading, never to arise again. From one point of view it never will arise again, He "shall appear ... the second time without sin for salvation" (Heb. 9: 28). It has been met and met entirely, and the death and blood of Jesus have provided the basis for an eternal scene in which man will be for God's pleasure and evil will never enter.

While in Revelation it is not exactly the eternal setting of which we have read, there is the reference to what the city has, "having the glory of God". We might enquire as to what is involved in that, and perhaps how it is to work out in our local settings, for the atmosphere of eternity is to be working in the local assembly. Now, in the interval Mr Wallace told me that the Lord's Day readings are not for beating out the doctrine but for mutual enquiry and atmosphere. Is that right?

W.W. I did not expect to be quoted, but I thought the Lord's Day readings were a bit different, with more of a family atmosphere. I suppose they begin with Christ, God has found His rest in Christ and He would have us to share that rest.

P.M. I thought we might get some touch of that,

"Object of eternal pleasure,
Perfect in Thy work divine!" (Hymn 206)

Object of God's pleasure, and the Object of the pleasure of every heart throughout eternity. Every heart will be centred upon Christ. All has hinged upon that blessed Man. Is that not involved in this

reference, "he will rest in his love"? The relationship which the Lord Jesus entered into will never pass away. Divine Persons will appreciate that relationship eternally and God will rest in all that Jesus is, and He will rest in His love as formed in the hearts of those that are before Him.

W.W. David's exercise in Psalm 132 would bear on this. He was thinking of God's pleasure, "Until I find out a place for Jehovah, habitations for the Mighty One of Jacob..." "Arise, Jehovah, into thy rest, thou and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness, and let thy saints shout for joy." (vv 5,8,9).

P.M. That is affecting because that was in the heart of a young man. Who gave him the light of it? Those of us who are younger could well be stimulated in our affections by what God is looking for. "Thou shalt bring them in", Moses says, "and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance" (Exodus 15: 17). Think of what God's longings were. It has gone right through, Moses carried it, David carried it, now it has come down to our day.

R.J.C. He says, "Behold, we heard of it at Ephratah, we found it in the fields of the wood" (v 6). Somebody must have been speaking out it. Do you think it would help us if we speak about that? It may arouse interest and exercise with others.

P.M. They were really speaking about Christ, the One in whom God has found His rest. He would no doubt have had some impression of the ark in its place with the staves drawn out. We are familiar in our conversation with the ark proceeding through the wilderness being borne by the Levites - how important that is - but let us also get a sense of the ark in its place with the staves drawn out. David says, 'I will commit myself to that'.

R.T. Does the expression, "he will rest in his love" imply that all the work has been done?

P.M. It must be that the work has been done by Christ, for the moral issue had to be resolved if God was to rest in His love. Then the work of the Spirit too, initially, in our individual exercises shedding abroad the love of God in our hearts, and forming collectively what

will display the love of God as formed substantially in a creature vessel. God will rest in that.

J.W. In Ephesians we have, "Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (chap 2: 21,22). Do you think that is the sphere where God can find His rest, and we can enjoy that rest?

P.M. And all taking character from Christ - "Jesus Christ himself", how wonderful that expression is! It could have been, 'Jesus Christ the cornerstone', but "Jesus Christ himself". Does it not give a sense of what He is personally that gives character to all that is for God's pleasure?

D.T.P. I was thinking how long God has waited for this. Of Israel as a nation He says "Let my son go, that he may serve me" (Exod 4: 23); God claims him, but how long He has to wait before there is response. Here things are different, are they not "he will rejoice over thee with joy"? There is a sense of settled relationships and a height reached; then things go on to joy and rest.

P.M. That is very affecting, "he will rejoice over thee with joy". Think of the blessed God rejoicing over thee, the triumph of His ways.

Someone referred to it here this morning, God's ways serving His purpose - the triumph of all His ways that have served His purpose in order that God might have the answer, and He will joy in it. It is not just that He secured something equal to what He has purposed, but He has secured something that affects Him because it is equal to what He purposed. It is such that it rejoices the heart of God.

P.B. In Numbers 10 it says, "Return, Jehovah, unto the myriads of the thousands of Israel" (v 36).

P.M. Wonderful, is it not, "the myriads of the thousands of Israel"?

Did we not have some sense this morning that we were in the presence of the heavenly hosts? and you think of the fulness of what is ascending to God, the myriads of those that love Him.

C.K.R. Open up a bit what the term 'atmosphere' conveys to you.

P.M. I think it suggests the feelings of the heart of God. There is what God has secured, glorious, great, wondrous, but I think the atmosphere brings out the feelings of the heart of God.

C.K.R. In one sense, is He the Creator of the atmosphere in which He dwells?

P.M. He must be so, and Christ giving character to it. Do you get a reference to it in 1 Corinthians 15, "that God may be all in all" (v 28)? God puts His own impression upon all that is proceeding for His own pleasure.

C.K.R. Often atmosphere is difficult to describe but it is very often felt.

P.M. And it is essential that there should be an atmosphere in our local companies that reflects the atmosphere of eternity. There we shall be safe. There is safety here, the enemy has been dealt with, "thou shalt not see evil any more"; there are conditions, you might say eternal life conditions, if we could speak of it in relation to the present day.

D.T.P. That is what has been said as to eternal life, is it not - an out of the world heavenly condition of things - and this is what is expressed as 'atmosphere', because you are taken away from what is here, and brought into the circumstances where Christ is. There things expand, do they not?

P.M. And He the centre of the mediatorial system, giving character to all that is proceeding Godward, and giving expression to all that is flowing from the heart of God. That love is active and will be eternally. We often speak of the love of God that has been active in time and will rest in eternity, but it is not that God's love will rest, it is God who will rest in His love. His love will flow throughout eternity.

Not in operating to secure an answer as He does in time, but enjoying the answer that has been secured.

R.J.C. It does not refer to His attributes, does it? He finally secures what is according to His own nature. Atmosphere would enter into

that, a sense that God is complacent now in all that He has secured, His love flowing.

P.M. That is helpful. His attributes have been manifested because He has operated in conditions that were not conducive to His holy presence, but He has secured out of such conditions an answer that will for ever be in keeping with His heart.

A.B. I wondered if what God has secured in His purpose and counsels is wonderful. In a sense God has secured everything, has He not? The working out of it in His love and His grace would affect us.

P.M. There is not one thing that He purposed that He has not secured; He has established it all, His purpose involving that He might head up everything in Christ. I think it is good for us when we are younger to get a sense of what the purpose of God is. We often think it is that I shall receive sonship, but the purpose of God does not centre in me, it centres in Christ. He has headed up all things in the Christ. It is wonderful to take account of it. It involved the way in which His love has gone, the depths to which it has gone in the death of Christ, and the fulness of that love now made known in order that God should have an answer in which that love will flow. I would like to get a touch of that, that the love will not be historical, if we could speak of what is historical in eternity, but it will flow throughout eternity. God will be towards His people, "he will rest in his love", and "he will exult over thee with singing".

G.A.B. In 1 Corinthians 13 faith and hope are referred to, which I suppose would enter into God's ways. These are active things, but love is that in which God can rest. It is the greater of these three, is it not?

P.M. Yes: love involves complacency, 'Where there was distance, now there is complacency'. It is wonderful not only to have the doctrine of it, but to get the experience of it that His love will flow throughout eternity in a complacent atmosphere.

G.A.B. It seems as though in that sense the time of activity is over and God is able to rest in His love because everything has been

done that can be done. Nothing has been left undone and there is nothing else but pure enjoyment now.

P.M. There will be no work, but as an old brother said where we were local when I was a boy, there will be restful activity and active rest. It is not just that we will as it were sit doing nothing, but we shall be active in the appreciation of all that God is.

M.C. "Sons loved and loving". It is an atmosphere which the world with all its hatred and other things would spoil what is for God but God has in mind that nothing of these things will intrude or take away.

P.M. That is very fine. It is not only that God will be the source of love, as indeed He must be, but He will have an answer in sons that love. Love will pervade eternity. We are in conditions at the moment where righteousness and holiness are often before us, and need to be before us because we are in a world of unholiness and unrighteousness, but in that scene it will be love.

D.T.P. To quote another hymn, "The more we learn Thy love, we love thee more!": that is very true, is it not? This is the time when we are learning more of that love and it should result in atmosphere when there is something yielded in which God has infinite pleasure.

P.M. Do we not see the example of it even in our natural relationships? As a son loves his father, he begins to move as the father moves, he begins to appreciate what the father appreciates.

Is that not how it works in relation to divine things that the more we are conscious of being loved by the Father, our affections are drawn out towards Him and we are able to move in something of the spirit that marks the eternal day.

We might move on to Revelation. In the eternal setting, which we did not read, the emphasis is on what God will do, but in the setting that we have read, the emphasis is more on what the city is.

I wondered if we could get a touch as to this reference, "having the glory of God".

R.J.C. Does it suggest that the assembly has the capacity to have the glory of God invested in it? I think it has been said that it is not a reflected glory, it is a refracted glory - that the assembly absorbs divine glory and radiates it.

P.M. It must therefore bring out something of the wonderful service of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus has found all that He looked for in the bride, but all that God has looked for He sees expressed in a city that is in keeping with Himself. It is not that she has the glory of Deity. The glory of God here would not be the glory of Deity, that could never be.

A.B. Is it significant that in the gospel John does not give us the bride? The Baptist says in chapter 3, as we know, "He that has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom...", but he brings it in here. Could you say why that is?

P.M. I suppose it awaited His death and resurrection and the incoming of the Spirit before the full light of the bride could be seen. But here this is shown to John: the book does not stop at the side of judgment, but it goes right on to show John what God will secure for Himself in a coming day.

R.T. Is the substantiality of the bride emphasised in those verses in the various graces that belong to her that are suited to eternal conditions? "Come here, I will shew thee...". It is already there, precious fruit of God's divine ways in the Spirit's work, but then she had certain features that are suited not to this earth but to eternal conditions for they shine on to the earth.

P.M. I think what you say as to what is substantial is helpful because what John sees could be described. He gets a view of the city that he could describe, "I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife". Then he says, he "shewed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out the heaven from God".

D.T.P. There is something fine, too, in the fact that John could identify what he saw. That seems to be what he writes. He sees all these wonderful things, but he is able to identify the glory that this

vessel has and its source. Is that because it has been in those conditions and is coming down?

P.M. Coming from God Himself. It has always been there in the purpose of God, but now it is about to come into display, and it has the glory of God. Then there is her shining. I wondered if the glory of God might have some reference to our being partakers of the divine nature, what is currently formed in the saints through the Spirit, involving affections that will mark eternity. It has the glory of God, it is formative, is it not?

P.B. Does "her shining" mean that it is in perfect keeping with the glory of God?

P.M. There will be no disparity. Does it not relate to what is mediatorial in the divine system, in which the assembly will take up her part. She will take up her part mediatorially.

R.T. Will the Spirit have a relationship with the assembly that will be greater or deeper than with any other families? Would that be suggested here in "having the glory of God"?

P.M. Yes, she is distinctive in the fact that the Spirit will be indwelling the assembly. The Spirit will rest upon other families, but the assembly will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Is that so?

R.T. It speaks of nations and others who will bring their glory to it, showing that there is a glory that belongs to the assembly that is fuller than what there is in other families. You may say that the whole mediatorial system is enhanced in the place that the assembly has in the link with the Spirit in Christ.

P.M. I think it is good that we should get a sense of that because if we are not careful, our impression of the assembly may be limited to what we touch in the public breakdown; but the assembly is so great, she will take up her part in the mediatorial system and the nations will walk by its light. Think of the fulness of what will shine out from the assembly and, as you say, the nations will bring their glory to it.

She will be forever united to Christ as the heavenly Man, and

indwelt by the Holy Spirit. How near to divine Persons this city will be!

W.W. In Ephesians 1 it is not the city. Does this bring out the distinctiveness of the assembly - "and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all" (v 22,23)? I was thinking of what was said as to the other families. The assembly is distinct amongst the families, first of all the families the only family with the indwelling Spirit. I think it has been suggested that Christ will confer with the assembly in His administration, so near she is to Him, and she is His fulness, speaking reverently, as though He were not complete without her.

P.M. Would that we had a greater sense of that. The city here involves administration, does it not? The perfect administration of Christ will be in relation to the city. Does not "the fulness of him" relate to expression? Did not F.E.R. help us that the fulness in Christianity involves the expression of the substance, that she is really the expression, and will be throughout the millennial day, of all that Christ is in His manhood.

W.W. Mr Taylor said the fulness is not as great as the thing itself.

We must preserve Christ's distinctiveness personally, but the assembly is such a wonderful vessel that, though never more than creature, yet she is in the nearest relationship to deity that could be.

P.M. And she will remain united to the heavenly Man. I believe that marks her out also in her distinctiveness, that she is united to Christ where He is.

P.W. Would you say something more about the distinction you drew between the glory of deity and the glory of God, and perhaps open up the glory of God a bit more in relation to the Trinity. Mr R Taylor made a reference to the Spirit, the glory of the Spirit indwelling the assembly, but I would like more help about the distinction between the deity and God and also perhaps a reference to the other persons of the Godhead.

P.M. I do not know if I could say much in answer to your question, but the glory of deity must belong alone to divine Persons. It could

never belong to or be placed upon creature. "My glory I will not give to another" (Isa 42: 8), it belongs to God alone, but I think this reference, "having the glory of God" is very closely related to the nature of God, God's love, that has been formed in the hearts of those that form this vessel and will come into expression. In one sense, persons in the millennial day will look at the city and say, 'That is what God's shining is like'. Wonderful thing! It will not be God Himself; it is, "her shining", but persons will get an impression that that is what the shining of God is like.

P.W. Should there not be something of that evident today in the assembly, not in that fulness, but there should be an expression of it.

P.M. I think it shines today morally in the assembly. The simple person coming in at Corinth would say, "God is among you of a truth"; there was the witness that the presence of God was there.

G.A.B. The assembly has been in the presence of God, has it not? It says, it comes "down out of the heaven from God". She could hardly be there without the glory of God being absorbed in some sense, taken on. Would you have an illustration of it in Moses' face shining through His talking with him. It is taken on and displayed.

P.M. It is taken on. That vessel has never belonged to the earth; it has always been heavenly, and has been in the presence of God Himself. She bears no other feature. We used to be taught that the assembly is heavenly in origin, character and destiny. Through wondrous grace we belong to that vessel and the dignity of that should affect us in our walk individually and collectively. You come into a company like this. What marks it? It is the heavenly atmosphere: the assembly is heavenly.

C.K.R. Is it right to think that the atmosphere of eternity will in some sense be displayed in the millennium?

P.M. You had better open that up for us.

C.K.R. I would like to get the full bearing of it. It is "having the glory of God". Verse 2 indicates what is eternal, "prepared as a bride

adorned for her husband" after a thousand years, but still there is freshness there.

P.M. I am sure the witness of the eternal atmosphere will be present in the millennium, and it will be known in a peculiar way by those that are in the city. When the saints are translated, we shall immediately be in eternal conditions. We shall not be part of what is proceeding on the earth; we shall remain heavenly, and what will sustain that city will be completely apart from what marks this scene and all that will proceed in it, but the city will shed its own atmosphere upon that scene.

C.K.R. It would also enhance the appearing, would it not? Some sense of the greatness of the rapture having taken place and the saints taking on glorified conditions lying behind the Lord coming out and declaring His rights publicly.

P.M. Yes and her relations with Him as the Lamb's wife - a wonderful thing that will be known and enjoyed throughout the millennial day, she will remain as the Lamb's wife. She will hold herself for Him and for the expression of Himself, but she will never cease to have the glory of God.

R.T. Is God reflected in the shining - "having the glory of God", and it says, "Her shining was like a most precious stone"?

P.M. "Her shining", what more would you say about it?

R.T. We have later on, "And the city has no need of the sun nor the moon, that they should shine for it"; "having the glory of God" gives character to this kind of shining. There is something superior to anything that has been seen before, superior to the old creation, you may say. There is what is shining out from this vessel that is from the glory of God really, is it not?

P.M. There will be perfect harmony between what she has and what shines forth.

M.C. I was thinking of what we have been taught, the response being equal to the revelation, and wondering how it would bear on this, the full outshining of God involving formation in love and

response being equal to what divine Persons themselves would secure.

P.M. That is something for us to ponder, the response equal to the revelation. In one sense that must be perfectly so in Jesus, the revelation is in Him and the response is in Him, but I think this reference comes very close to that.

D.M. Could you say something as to the Lamb's wife. It is not the Lord's wife nor the wife of Christ, it is the Lamb's wife. Is there some reference to the suffering through which He has gone?

P.M. It is an affecting reference, the Lamb's wife. All has been secured on the basis of His suffering, but there is a vessel in which there has been formation through suffering. How much suffering there is today, not only among ourselves but with others who will comprise this vessel: think of persons who suffered behind the Iron Curtain, persons who suffer in China and other countries. They are faithful to the light that they have. That will all enter into some measure of formation in this city.

I wondered if in Corinthians we might get a touch as to the greatness of that love that works out through the local company. As was said, finally there are features that will be done away, they will not be needed any longer, but love remains.

D.McG. Is the significance of Paul's ministry to Titus that in such a company in its behaviour, he should speak of "awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory", not 'of our Saviour', but "of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2: 13)? I think it is an enticement and a great encouragement to think that despite all that we might be marked by and have to work out in a spirit of self-judgment in order to eat and drink worthily, eternity is opened to us in that way.

P.M. We are going through a scene in which we feel the departure and the public breakdown. We are waiting for the appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. How great He is! Oh, that His greatness might fill my soul increasingly and not only objectively, but

in view of having a full claim over our affections. He has moved towards us in His affections in order that He might secure ours.

D.McG. "Perpetual freshness marks th'eternal day".

P.M. Yes. There is what will be done away. We concentrate a good deal on it and it has its place and its importance, and it needs to be filled out, taken up and carried out soberly while we are here, but it is not eternal; but love will remain.

G.A.B. Does "that which is perfect" involve the body of glory? You cannot but feel the limitations of the present time. We have an hour or thereabouts on Lord's Day morning of something that takes us out of this scene, but then we have to stop. We cannot go on because of the condition in which we are, but "when that which is perfect has come", we will have bodies which will be equal to the environment into which we have been brought.

P.M. And we will have bodies like unto His own body of glory. He will give character to it all, even the bodies of the saints will take character from His. How wonderful that is. You can see that God must head up everything in Christ. The whole of the eternal day will reflect in every detail the glory of that blessed Man.

P.B. "Love never fails".

P.M. I wonder if I believe that. Things do arise in our gatherings, and we are conscious of them. Let us lay hold of it that love never fails. How has God moved towards us? He has moved in love. Where would we be if it was not for His love? "Because of his great love wherewith he loved us" (Ephesians 2: 4) - that is to be seen in expression, in the local company. It is not just that things are put right in the spirit of love when they go wrong but "love never fails ", things do not go wrong. Things and persons are maintained in affection for Christ. I believe - I feel the need of it for myself - that if this atmosphere marked us more, often the disturbances that arise would soon be resolved because love never fails.

D.McG. The one to whom this revelation was made was one who could speak of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved", and at

one point in his history he is leaning on the bosom of Jesus. I wonder if that would help us in the resolving of these things you are speaking about. It is to him that the word is "Come here", and immediately, as if he were ready, having had these experiences when Jesus was here.

P.M. He lived in the enjoyment of the love of Jesus, therefore the Lord could say of him finally, "If I will that he abide until I come" (John 21:22). There was that which was stable in John that was going through to the end because he was drawing on the love of Jesus.

"The love of Jesus, what it is,
None but His loved ones know." (Hymn 279)

That is to pervade the local company.

J.W. Love is the fruit of the Spirit. It is spiritual love, it is not natural love, is it?

P.M. That is important. It is not just a social company that we have been brought to. If it was a social company on man's level, it would soon end in corruption, but this is really the reflection of the love of God working in the local company so that everyone is in their place, everyone is happy, everyone is centred on Christ. I think you see something of it in Bethany. Death had come in, that first order of natural affection had been broken in upon and removed, but there were conditions in which love was known and Christ was the Centre.

D.M. The last verse of that hymn 456, "Thy willing people, formed in love from which no power shall sever" - I wondered if that fitted in with what you were saying at the moment.

P.M. That really sums up what we have been working at, that God will have a people eternally that have been formed in love. But let us not wait till the eternal day, let us enjoy the atmosphere of it now increasingly.

KIRKCALDY

12 June 1994

Key to initials

(local unless indicated)

G.A.B. G.A.Brown, Edinburgh; A.B. A.Buchan; P.B. P.Buchan;
R.J.C. R.J.Campbell, Glasgow; M.C. M.Cowan; D.McG.
D.McGregor, Lochgelly; P.M. P.Martin, Colchester; D.M.
D.Matthews; D.T.P. D.T.Pye; C.K.R. C.K.Robinson, Glasgow; R.T.
R.Taylor; W.W. W.Wallace; P.W. P.White; J.W. J.Wilson

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Paul Martin

Lamentations 1: 5,12; Matthew 22: 2-12

These two passages both refer to our Lord Jesus - quite different settings, but the same Person. God is speaking of Him; He has never ceased to speak of Him. He loves to speak of Jesus. We can thank God that through grace we love to speak of Him too. He is speaking of Him that He might win your heart, that He might win you for Himself. You may say to me, 'I am not interested in the gospel'.

That does not alter the fact that God is interested in you. Your blessing, my blessing, have not depended on my interest. Where would any of us be if God had operated on the basis of our interest? But God is interested in you. Of course, He loves interested persons, that comes out early in His ways with men. Moses was a young man and he was interested; he saw a bush burning and he was interested in it, so what he learned was that God was interested in him. Whatever your feelings as to Jesus are, I can tell you with assurance that God is interested in you tonight. He has feelings for you, He has feelings for all men. The love and grace of our Saviour God has appeared - what wondrous grace! Why should it appear?

Because God's heart was going out to man, and it has never ceased to go out. The awful happenings in the world, have they altered God's heart? They never have. Think of the atrocities in Ruanda. Have they altered God's heart? No. The awful happenings during the Gulf War, did they alter God's heart? Never.

Think of what happened for these people who have just been celebrating D-Day. Did they alter God's heart? They have not changed the heart of God. You may say, 'I am too bad; I do not feel worthy'. That does not alter God's heart. He is still interested in you, and thank God, He has been interested in me however bad my history may have been. Why? Because He has provided the basis whereby He could meet it all. God is not towards you or me on the basis of demand. He is towards us because the demands have been met in the Person of Jesus.

I trust the Spirit will help us to speak of this verse for what a verse it is - "Is it nothing to you..." I do not know where you are going today, what your ambitions are. We all have ambitions, even older people have ambitions. You may look at the older brothers and say, 'Well, I am sure the day of their ambitions is over'. Do you think so? I think I am right in saying that we all have a measure of ambition, all of us. Where are you going? Passing by, - what are you passing by? Are you passing by the Saviour hanging in His sorrow upon Calvary's tree? There were many that passed by. One of the Gospel writers tells us that the passers-by reviled Him. Are you passing by tonight? He will stop you. He will say this word to you, "Is it nothing to you...?" Is it nothing? Does it not mean anything to you? Passing by with your own objectives in view - does it not mean anything to you? It says, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow". 'Oh', you say, 'there is a lot of sorrow in the world', and so there is. I tell you, there has been no sorrow like the sorrow of Jesus. He came into this scene, the perfect, holy, spotless Man. What sorrow filled His heart as He moved here to see the depravity of man, the departure of man from God. He felt it all so keenly, He felt the fact that sin had made its inroad, that death had made its inroad into humanity. He felt it; think of Jesus weeping.

Oh, what tears they were. He said prophetically at one point that "sorrow has broken my heart", "sorrow has broken my heart". The Lord Jesus was a Man of sorrows - what a name for the Son of God! He never ceased to be the Son of God, glorious in His own Person and never ceasing to be the Son of God, but He came in as a Man of sorrows. He felt for a widow whose son was being carried out of the city; He felt for the blind man who could not see. He felt for the man who was possessed by demons. The Lord Jesus not only removed those things in His power, but He felt it then. He felt the sorrow, He felt what it was that man was away from God and that the devil had made his inroad so fully into humanity. "By one man sin entered into the world, and by sin death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5: 12); "... it is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment" (Hebrews 9: 27), the portion of all. Could anyone stop it? Men are working frantically to find a cure

for things that bring in death, but if they find a cure for one, they never find a cure for the fact that it is the portion of men once to die, and after death the judgment. It is the portion of men: it is your portion. It was not the portion of this blessed Man of whom we speak. He came in to die, not because death attached to Him, but in love for you and for me. Oh, is it nothing to you? Just stop for a moment; do not keep passing by. "Is it nothing to you...? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow". Think of the sorrow that the Saviour bore as He stood that night in the palace of the High Priest, what sorrow was His. They did not provide a seat for Him. He stood there through the night. He bore the jeering, the mocking, the beatings that men placed upon Him. He stood there through the night. What a night it was! How dark was the night that the Lord passed through, how dark it was. Have you ever pondered it? We read it, it is covered in one verse of scripture, so briefly, but have you ever pondered what it meant to the Saviour that He should stand there and become the object of mocking of the whole of humanity? What sorrow was His! He had come in to save those persons; He had done no ill. In wondrous grace, He had put His healing hand upon them. He had come in to save, to heal. The answer He received was that night when he stood, and stood there alone. No-one stood with Him, not one ray of comfort from any, but He stood there alone. Oh, what sorrow! He did not feel it only in what it meant to Him, but He felt it all in what it meant to God. He not only stood there as God's representative, but He as One who Himself could feel as God felt, could feel the departure of man and the hatred of man as God felt it because Himself, He was God. Oh the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, "... ye know the grace..." (2 Corinthians 8: 9), what grace there was. Did He answer, did He return what was heaped upon Him? He bore it all, in love and He went onward. That was not all. They made fun of Him. The Lord Jesus says prophetically, "I am the song of the drunkards" (Psalm 69: 12). He would feel that. In the public houses of this world, He was the song of the drunkards and He remains it today.

Oh, do not go there, do not go there! He is hated there, He is mocked there, he is ridiculed there. He had to go onward still. It

says in John, Jesus "went out, bearing his cross" (ch 19: 17). What majesty marked the Saviour as He went out to die, "And he went out, bearing his cross". He did not shrink from it, He went that way for you and for me in wondrous grace. He went forth; the Son of man goes as it is determined of Him. That was on the one hand. On the other "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and was as a sheep dumb before her shearers, and he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53: 7). What perfection! Would you or I be like that? Most of us here would have to say that if provoked a little percentage of what the Lord Jesus was provoked we would have answered much. He answered not a word. He bore the sorrows alone. Oh what sorrow is 'like unto My sorrow'! He bore the sorrow of Israel away from God. They were under Roman rule; He felt it and He bore it. He took it all upon Himself. Oh, blessed Saviour, how wondrous He is, and He went on to the cross. What a death that was, "becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross" (Philippians 2: 8).

The Lord Jesus hung there upon a wooden cross, in order that He might fully complete the will of God. He said, Lo, I come to do Thy will. What that meant to Him; He knew every footstep of His pathway and what that would cost. You and I do not know what tomorrow will bring, but He knew what it would bring. What wondrous grace that we do not know what tomorrow will bring.

Wondrous grace that He knew and in grace and in love He went forward, never flinching, to secure and complete the will of God.

What a Man! He says, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, whom Jehovah hath afflicted in the day of his fierce anger", "whom Jehovah hath afflicted". I hardly know how to speak of it. What He bore from man was terrible, but what He bore from God! He was going that way as the sin-bearer. Oh, the wonder of the grace of Jesus. Sin did not attach to Him. He was perfect, but He was going that way as the sin-bearer. You and I could never be the sin-bearer. You could never make atonement for your sins, nor can I. It required One who was perfect, One who was without spot, the blood of Jesus as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (see 1 Peter 1: 19). What a Man.

He went forward as the sin bearer. In those three hours of darkness

the Lord Jesus was made it. You and I could never be made sin, we are sinful, but He was perfect and He was made sin. You can understand that there should be darkness. God covered the scene in darkness. Who could behold such a sight, when the holy Saviour hanging there was made sin. God poured out His judgment, "whom Jehovah hath afflicted in the day of his fierce anger". Think of God's anger against sin but not only His judgment; judgment can be implemented unfeelingly but this was not unfeeling. God poured out His fierce anger on the head of Jesus. What did He do? He hung there in silence, He bore it all. He had never known God's wrath, or God's displeasure. He had known perfect complacent affection and intimacy of relations even up to the point of those three hours of darkness. He had known God's pleasure, but, hanging there upon that cross, God poured out His fierce anger on the head of Jesus.

Why? Because of what I had done. Do you not love Him for what He has done for you? I ask you that simply, do you love Him for what He has done for you? No-one else could have done it, but He has done it alone, He has borne the anger, and exhausted it, and now He is crowned with glory and honour at God's right hand. How worthy He is. What a Saviour! "Hallelujah! what a Saviour!" He has done every thing for God, and I can say He has done everything for me, for my eternal blessing, for my present blessing, for my eternal happiness and for my present happiness, He has done it all,

"My soul shall then still praise Him,
And loud His grace extol -
Thou hast Thyself redeemed me;
Yes, Thou hast done it all!" (Hymn 367)

The Lord Jesus has shed His precious blood in order that you might be cleansed from your sins. When man had heaped all that he could against Jesus, God poured out the fulness of His love; He caused it to flow that you and I might know what it is to come into blessing on the basis of His sorrow His suffering, His blood and His rising again. He has done it all, how worthy He is, worthy that the King might make a wedding feast for His Son. "A king", it says, "made a wedding feast for his son" - it is not now a moment of sorrow, this is

a moment of joy. He has made a wedding feast, "and sent his bondmen to call the persons invited". We know the typical teaching in this that there were those that had a right to the blessing. Do not think you had a right to the blessing. You may have been brought up in a believing house, thank God for it. You may not thank God for it at the moment, you may not appreciate it, but as you go on in your life and look back, you appreciate the fact that your mother wept for you and prayed for you. In the grace of God He is sending out His bondmen tonight to compel persons to come in. Why? To make something of you? To make everything of Christ, and He wants you to share His joy as to Christ. He is interested in you, He knows more about you than you do, even the hairs of your head are numbered.

He knows just what you are today. Think of the God that follows you, the God that knows every detail about you. He never loses sight of what we are, but He appeals to us in the light of what Christ is, and He is making a wedding feast for His Son who is so pleasurable to Him, who has done everything for Him, who has satisfied Him not only in what He has done but in the very perfection of the way in which it was done. He says, I will make a wedding feast, I will provide the best that I can for my Son and I will invite you to come in. Are you going to come tonight? Are you going to come and make Jesus the centre? He is the centre of everything for God; He wants you to come in in order that He might be the centre of everything for you. God is appealing to you. He is not commanding; it says, "The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy; go therefore into the thoroughfares of the highways, and as many as ye shall find invite...", invite. He is saying to you tonight, 'Come in. Come in.' Will you find anything better? You never will. I know the world appeals. It changes its latest gimmicks and inventions to attract the minds of men but God is not changing anything, He does not need to. What He has provided in His feast is sufficient, sufficient to satisfy God, sufficient to satisfy you and it will satisfy you eternally. He is saying, 'Won't you come in? Won't you come in?' Do not dabble in the things that hold your interest at the moment. You know how short-lived they are. We can all remember how when we were young, we picked up something today, we lost

interest in it tomorrow. Come in to feast on the love of God, and you will never pick up something today and lose interest tomorrow.

Everything is there for your eternal blessing and satisfaction, and God is appealing to you tonight on the basis of the sacrificial work of Jesus, and He is saying, 'Invite those persons to come in'. Are you going to your own land? You say, 'Those fields look better, I will go to my own land'. God has a land. We used to sing when we were children, "There is a happy land where saints in glory stand, bright, bright as day". Are you going to be among them, to take up your part there in the enjoyment of God's love, His love for Christ? He wants you to share that love for Christ; He wants Him to become the centre of everything in your life as He is the centre of everything for God. We sang at the beginning of our time this afternoon,

"Object of eternal pleasure,
Perfect in Thy work divine!" (Hymn 206)

The Lord Jesus will be the Object of eternal pleasure for myriads upon myriads of saints. Is He going to be your Object? Will you not put your faith in Him? Put your faith in His precious blood that was shed on Calvary's tree, shed for rebels, shed for sinners - can you say, 'Shed for me!'. Claim the efficacy of that blood for yourself and have the assurance in the blessed Holy Spirit that that blood and that blood only can cleanse you from your sins, and through the blessed Man who is now at God's right hand, come to know what it is to have peace with God. If Jesus was not there you could never have peace, but we have peace because He is there. The peace is not in what we have done or what we feel. You do not have peace because you repented, necessary as that is, you have peace because Christ is at God's right hand, "Therefore having been justified ... we have peace towards God", "having been justified" (Romans 5: 1). How could you have peace with God if you were not justified, if all that history was still rising in your mind, if you knew that it had not been fully cleared? We have been in an atmosphere today when there has been peace,

"Where deceiver ne'er can enter,
Sin-soiled feet have never trod" (Hymn 206)

All that history completely gone and God looking at you tonight in the worth of Jesus. You say, 'I will try and do better'. Do not try. You will never succeed. God is not looking for you to try and do better, He has one Man who has done everything perfectly, He does all things well. He would accept you in the Person of that blessed Man. That is what the best robe is, that there is a Man before God in subsisting righteousness, and God is clothing these that believe in the worth of that Man. Are you clothed tonight in the worth of Christ? The Spirit would give you the present consciousness of it. I would appeal to you, if you are not conscious of the joy of salvation, ask the Father to give you the Spirit that He may give you the consciousness of the joy of salvation and the power to walk here in the dignity of it, and to know what it is to become one of the King's sons.

Mephibosheth became that. He ate at the king's table continually, and he became one of the king's sons. Would you not like that, to come in on the basis of mercy and become the King's son? God is not offering anything less. All the wealth that God has in His heart and in His house, and in divine provision can be yours as you come to know the Lord Jesus. Will you not come? Will you not let His sorrow touch your heart? He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, we could never bear His, He bore them alone. Let His sorrow touch your heart tonight. One dear man said, 'The Lord Jesus has won my affections in His down-stooping, but He holds them now where He is in the glory'. Let Him win your affections!

"If He claims our hearts' affections
Unreserved of His own,
'Tis because of love unchanging,
That in Him was first made known." (Hymn 111)

It is not our love - our love is so fickle - but it was His love, and you will prove along with others in this room that it is not only that His love that was manifested on the cross, but that love is towards you still and will be unchanged until you reach home with Him where He is. He is an all-the-wayhome Saviour. He is sufficient for everything. How slow we are sometimes to prove it, but He is sufficient for everything. We often think we can plan things better, but He is able

for it all. Let us leave our circumstances, our affairs in His hands, because He has greater affairs to bring us into. He said to one dear woman, "Thou art careful and troubled about many things" (Luke 10: 41); how often I am like that, dashing here and there, careful and troubled about many things, "but there is need of one, and Mary has chosen the good part, the which shall not be taken from her". What part was hers? She was absorbed with Jesus. She came to prove that not only was He sufficient for the circumstances through which they had passed, but He was occupying her affections with another world altogether. He is the centre of that world. The believer does not belong to this world. Some of us were saying in the house at lunchtime that the believer is spoiled for this world. You do not fit in here, you could not. The Lord Jesus, in putting His claim in redemption upon you, has left an impression of Himself that will never be accepted here, He has left it upon the believer. I say to you, feed upon Him. Remember in Exodus 12 when the passover lamb was slain, the Israelite had to eat of the lamb, there was no choice, he had to eat, it was a commandment, and in that I think God gave the Israelites an appetite for the food that did not belong to Egypt but belonged to another world. Feast upon Jesus where He is; feast upon Him too as the sacrificial Lamb. Once you start, you will not want to stop. There are many sitting here today who will tell you that it was hard-going to start reading ministry, it was hard-going to start reading the Scriptures regularly, but once you get a taste for them do not want to stop. You will find that to be your portion, I am sure you will, because everything that God has provided for your happiness is so full and so permanent, and so satisfying. May you come to know the Saviour and that He is not only sufficient to save you from your sins, but sufficient to satisfy you for time and for eternity. May it be so, for His Name's sake!

KIRKCALDY

12 June 1994

PREPARATION

J.T.Brown

Amos 4: 12 (last clause); Luke 12: 16-21; 8: 43-48; Acts 7: 54-60

"Prepare to meet thy God!" There is no greater challenge in the universe tonight than these words. They come from the lips of God Himself, challenging every man and woman and boy and girl without exception and striking at the very core of our beings, our consciences, our affections and our hearts. Essential issues are stirred; moral issues are raised which have a bearing not only on our natural lives but on our eternal destiny. It is a meeting which no-one can shirk, from which no man or woman or boy or girl can be excused. In the gospels they said, "I pray thee hold me for excused", Luke 14: 18. But there will be a day of reckoning and no power in the universe will be sufficient to prevent that meeting between God and the godless. Men will have to meet their Maker. They will have to meet their Creator. When God utters these words, it is a cry of warning, but rooted in mercy. It is a cry of urgency, but it is steeped in grace.

Preparation is a matter about which God is greatly concerned. The universe was created with punctilious care. Proverbs 8: 27 says that "He prepared the heavens" and Job tells us that "by His Spirit the heavens are adorned". In the gospel the Lord Jesus says, "Consider the lilies how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I say unto you, Not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed as one of these", Luke 12: 27. Even the lily of the field, these little flowers, so exquisite, so delicate, so sensitive, have the touch of the Master's hand, reflecting God's work in creation. Then there are the stars! He counts the number of the stars. Not only that, He gives names to them all, Psalm 147: 4. Think of every star in the universe! Consider the Milky Way, as it is called, and the thousands upon thousands of stars it contains. Then there are the galaxies beyond. Yet every star is counted, every star is named, such was the care with which the creation was made.

But there was something else that was prepared and it was prepared that the way of redemption might be opened up for men.

Hebrews says in relation to the Lord Jesus: "... thou hast prepared me a body", chap 10: 5. How wonderful to think of divine workmanship entering into the body which Jesus took in manhood on earth. It says, "Wherefore coming into the world he says, Sacrifice and offering thou willedst not; but thou hast prepared me a body." There could be nothing more distinctive than the body God prepared for His son. The gospels tell us of the birth of Jesus. Luke tells us that the power of the Highest overshadowed Mary: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and power of the Highest overshadow thee, wherefore the holy thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God", chap. 1: 35. Psalm 139: 15,16 give some indication of the care with which we are formed : "curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth ... in thy book all my members were written; during many days were they fashioned...". Nothing is haphazard or left to chance in respect of any one of us. But supremely, sublimely in Jesus there was divine perfection in manhood. Luke gives us the early days of the Lord Jesus. He grew up "in favour with God and men", chap 1: 52. "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and God's grace was upon him", v 40. Contemplate Him year by year as He grew up under the divine eye, not a step, not a movement contrary to the divine will. In relation to the oblation the expression "prepared in the cauldron" is used, Leviticus 2: 7. Then later, it is "prepared in the pan with oil: saturated with oil..." (6: 21). There was capacity in the humanity of Jesus to bear the intensest pressure.

The wonder of the glad tidings is that, before guilty sinners could be relieved of their guilt, that precious body had to be laid down in death. In that body, divinely prepared, our sins were borne at Calvary: "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. Think of God, speaking reverently, preparing the body of the Lord Jesus for such a transaction, a body that would bear our sins. He was my Substitute at Calvary. He bore my sins there. I wonder if everyone here can say that. He bore the awful wrath of God

against sin that I might escape the penalty of sin. In chapter 53 of Isaiah, it says, "Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath subjected him to suffering", v 10. Oh, what the Lord Jesus bore, dear friends, at the hands of His God that the way of redemption might be prepared for you and for me, the road into blessing opened up for the guiltiest, vilest sinner. I wonder if you know this precious Saviour. Does He have a place in your heart? He shed His precious blood at Calvary that sinners might go free, "not by corruptible things, as silver or gold ... but by precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot", 1 Pet 1: 18,19.

Well, God has prepared the way for men and women to come into His presence, not as guilty sinners, but as forgiven. How can He do it? Because Jesus has suffered and died, borne the whole incubus of sin, that guilty sinners as coming to Him and confessing their sins in His presence might be free and free for ever.

I read in Luke 12 for here was a man who was not prepared. He was obsessed with the things of this world. He was not prepared to meet His God and that typifies men today, trusting in riches, consumed with ambition, indulging in idle pursuits which of themselves produce no lasting satisfaction or gain. In Ecclesiastes there was a man who says, "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of every kind of fruit; I made me ponds of water...", chap 2: 4-6. There is a whole catalogue of things he did but then it ends up, "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that it had cost me to do them; and behold, all was vanity and pursuit of the wind, and there was no profit under the sun", v 11. Remarkable words these, "under the sun", as if he was peering here and looking there, just to see if the sun would illuminate something that was even a little bit profitable. But He is driven to the inescapable conclusion that: "all was vanity and pursuit of the wind."

So this man sought to build his welfare and his security in riches. He says, "This will I do: I will take away my granaries and build greater, and there I will lay up all my produce and my good

things; and I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much good things laid by for many years..." Presumptuous words! Ecclesiastes says, "There is no man who hath control over the spirit to retain the spirit ... and there is no discharge in that war", chap 8: 8. God, dear friends, holds the spirits of men in His hand. He decides on the duration of our lives and it is His decision alone. The poet says,

"In all my wanderings through this world of care
In all my griefs, and God has given my share,
I still had hopes my latest hours to crown
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down
To husband out life's taper at the close
And keep the flame from wasting by repose
And as a hare whom hounds and horn pursue
Pursues to the place from whence at first she flew
I still had hopes my long vexations past
Here to return to home to die at last."
Alas! Alas! His cherished hopes were dashed.

Events conspired to thwart his ambition of returning home in old age to the haunts of his childhood. Man has no control over his destiny in this world. His little life is as a candle flickering, stuttering, then in just one breath, snuffed out. And what then? "If thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou then contend with horses? And if in a land of peace thou thinkest thyself in security, how wilt thou then do in the swelling of the Jordan?" Jer 12: 5. The awful moment comes: "Fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." So, in grace, God poses the challenge: "prepare to meet thy God" in order that we may be ready.

I wonder if everyone here is prepared to meet their God, prepared to meet their Creator, the One who holds our lives in His palm, can terminate our life forthwith, or can extend it at His will. God gets to the very kernel of things: "Soul!" "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?" Mark 8: 36. The Psalmist says there are those who "depend upon their wealth, and boast themselves in the abundance of their riches", but then he goes on to say, "None can by any means redeem his

brother, nor give to God a ransom for him, (For the redemption of their soul is costly, and must be given up for ever)", Ps. 49: 6-8. "For the redemption of their soul is costly". Oh, what a cost, dear friends: the price was precious blood. "None can by any means redeem his brother": if you had the whole world on one side of the scale and one man's soul on the other, it could never suffice. All the riches, all the grandeur, all the majesty of this world could never serve to pay the price of redemption, meet the ransom, to bring a soul without sin into the presence of God. There was only one remedy, only one ransom, and it was the precious blood of Jesus, the One "who gave himself a ransom for all", 1 Tim 2: 6. He was the ransom. He laid down His life. He bore the penalty of sin that guilty sinners might go free and be relieved forever of sin's awful burden. I wonder if we are all ready to be called into the divine presence. There is a day coming when persons will be required to stand before their God. Revelation speaks about "the dead, great and small, standing before the throne", chap 20: 12. What a sight! Men and women, their souls required of them, standing in the ultimate court of judgement. The books are brought out "and the dead were judged ... according to their works". The book of life is opened "and if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire", v 15. Oh, how solemn and compelling these words become: "prepare to meet thy God". It is absolutely essential that you are prepared. Is there a heart here unprepared? We would appeal to you with all the affection and emotion we can muster as God would appeal to you. His hands are out stretched to bless. He appeals to men tonight, calls to sinners, deep-dyed in sin in all their degradation, in all their hopeless plight. The message is that to them divine grace and mercy are reaching out.

"But when the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared, not on the principle of works which have been done in righteousness which we had done, but according to his own mercy...", Tit 3: 4,5. God's own mercy - none other's would do - is reaching out to guilty sinners tonight, to bless them, to flood their souls with the joy of forgiveness, to have them experience the joy of

salvation, to have them know the blessed experience of a link with the Man in the glory, with the One who died to save them.

"The sinner who believes is free,
Can say, The Saviour died for me;
Can point to the atoning blood
And say, This made my peace with God." (Hymn 357)

Have you peace with God, dear friends? I appeal to you: examine your heart, examine your conscience. The opportunity is available tonight to make your peace with God, to put your trust in Jesus, to confess yours in is in His presence, and to place your faith in His finished work. Nothing can equal the experience and the joy of feeling your sins just dissipating and being removed, by virtue of what He has done. God says in our Scripture, "And whose shall be what thou hast prepared?" Hebrews tells us "there is not a creature unapparent before him; but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we have to do", chap. 4: 13. You cannot hide behind what you have prepared in a material sense. You cannot shelter behind the facade of riches, personality or whatever. God gets right down to your soul. The gospel would strike at your conscience and at the very core and essence of your being, impressing on you the urgency of the moment. The awfulness of a lost eternity is unimaginable; Christ-rejectors or just Christ-ignorers will be there; and maybe even persons who, with indifference and apathy, have heard the Gospel week in and week out. Sad climax to a lifetime of lost opportunities, conveyed in the Divine indictment "Fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee". There will be no court of appeal, no message of mercy, no comforting word of grace.

All is finished; all is hopeless. Ah! but the Saviour waits tonight, friend, waits to bless with a heart as appealing, a heart as loving and as full of affection, as when He suffered and died at Calvary and rose again. His precious blood is as efficacious now as when it was shed at Calvary and is able to cleanse the vilest. Put your trust in Him! If there is someone with an aching void in their hearts, Jesus can fill it. Simply turn to Him! You will find an answer in Him to your every need.

In chapter 8 the circumstances are different. Instead of a man who did not understand he needed to be prepared for eternity, there is here a woman who realised she had a need but was preparing in the wrong way. Some of us are like that perhaps. We understand something needs to be done but we go about it in the wrong way.

We try to find a remedy at our own hands and we cast here and search there to seek a solution. This woman "had had a flux of blood since twelve years, who, having spent all her living on physicians, could not be cured by any one". She had tried every medicine but none could effect a cure. Whatever the world can offer, it will never cure the effects of sin. Rather the supposed relief it tantalisingly promises will make the situation worse. Jeremiah says "There is none to plead thy cause, to bind up thy wound; thou hast no healing medicines", chap 30: 13. I tell you, friend, there is no free health service in Satan's realm, no free prescriptions in Satan's world. The cost is awful. It will end in death and in your eternal loss. You can picture this woman getting more and more desperate, knowing that she needed a cure, realising that her strength was ebbing away, recognising that her end was at hand. She was in a terrible plight; she was at an extremity and all hope had virtually been extinguished.

But then she comes into touch with the precious Saviour. Hope is revived! "Coming up behind" she 'touched the hem of his garment". Could anything be easier? She simply touches the hem of His garment. Reach out your hand tonight, friend, and touch the hem of His garment! How accessible He is! "The word is near thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart: that is the word of faith, which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from among the dead, thou shalt be saved", Rom 10: 8,9. "The word is near thee", within touching range, speaking reverently. The poet speaks of:

"The feeble hands and helpless
Groping blindly in the darkness
Touch God's right hand in that darkness
And are lifted up and strengthened."

Oh, just reach out and touch the precious Saviour! You will find relief; you will find joy; you will find satisfaction. It says in that chapter in Jeremiah so beautifully, "For I will apply a bandage unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds", chap 30: 17. It is not just a temporary remedy but complete healing. It is like justification: not only are you saved from your sins, but you are exonerated. God welcomes you into His presence as declared completely free of blame or charge. Justification is one of the great blessings of the gospel. Forgiveness is grand; but the sense of being justified by God Himself is glorious. He is the God "who justifies the ungodly", Rom 4: 5, one of the grandest statements in the whole canon of scripture. Our sins are cast away into the depths of the sea, as Micah speaks about it, chap 7: 19, never to be revived, never to be recalled, never to be brought against us because it is God who justifies. So the Lord Jesus says to the woman "Be of good courage, daughter; thy faith has healed thee; go in peace". May every heart here have this sense of peace, and the blessed assurance that Jesus has accomplished the whole work of redemption. Ours is simply to believe and to put our trust in that precious One and in His finished work.

I read in Acts for here was a man who was prepared. In chapter 12 of Luke the man was unprepared and made no pretence of preparation; in Luke 8 the woman sought to prepare in the wrong way, but divine grace led her eventually into contact with the precious Saviour. But in Stephen we see a man who was prepared. Prepared for what? Prepared for glory! Romans speaks about it: "that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory", Rom. 9: 23.

Stephen had his eye on the One who had accomplished everything for him. It says, "he saw the glory of God, and the Jesus standing at the right hand of God". Here was a scene of bitter opposition and enmity. As Stephen brought before his accusers the awfulness of what they had done to the Lord Jesus they became so enraged that they stoned him. But Stephen was prepared to live and to die for the Saviour who had given Himself that he might be saved from his sins.

What did he say? "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit". These were the words of one who was prepared for glory. He was resting securely on His Saviour's finished work. Nothing could come between him and Jesus. His eyes were fixed on Jesus and he was prepared to enter His presence, a vessel of mercy, prepared for glory.

Every believer in Jesus can take that place, as a vessel of mercy, undeserved, unwarranted, and unmerited, but to whom divine grace and divine mercy have reached out in all our need, picked us up and placed us on the pinnacles of blessing. "As the dew of Hermon that descendeth on the mountains of Zion; for there hath Jehovah commanded the blessing, life for evermore", Ps 133: 3. He brings us up from the lowest point and gives us a place on the summits of Zion's mountains. Joying in God's sovereign mercy and enjoying eternal life, our distance from God removed through the death of His Son in the glory of reconciliation. Who can enjoy these things? Those who have had a transaction with the precious Saviour, and who have the Holy Spirit, the wonderful gift in the glad tidings, to empower us to go through this scene of contrariety and to enable us to enter into the grandest and the most glorious blessings of God. Colossians 1: 12 tells us that the Father "has made us fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light." He has prepared us for that. How has He done it? He has given us the best robe, a ring on our fingers, and sandals on our feet so that we might be equipped and prepared for the divine presence and enjoy the Father's house in the liberty of sonship. Stephen in this hostile scene was one blessedly prepared for the highest things. He could rise above his circumstances. Some of us are pulled down by the weight of our circumstances. Stephen rose above them. Why? Because he had his eyes on the Man in the glory.

I wake in the morning with thoughts of His love
Who is living for me in the glory above
Each moment expecting He'll call me away
And that keeps me bright for the rest of the day.

May our eyes be more fixed on the Man in the glory, preparing and prepared for that glorious day when we shall be with Him for ever.

For that is the glad prospect of every love of Jesus - to be with Him eternally.

The thought of preparation comes in much to scripture: "Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him", 1 Cor 2: 9. What blessed things are available to us for our enjoyment now. Then, in that final day, the holy city will come down "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband", Rev 21: 2. Then the preparation which has gone on through the generations, down through the dispensation, will come out in glorious display, and the universe will see the grand culmination of the preparatory work, which has taken place in every blood-bought saint who will form part of that glorious assembly, which will answer eternally to the longings of the Lord Jesus Himself. May our hearts be freshly stirred towards this glorious One. I end with the appeal: "prepare to meet thy God"!

May everyone here be able to say from the bottom of their hearts that they are prepared, and that they have the blessed assurance of a link with the precious Saviour, which nothing can sever and which will stand us in good stead, not only for the rest of our life, but for the whole of eternity. For His Name's sake.

KIRKCALDY

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