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THE PRIESTLY SERVICE OF CHRIST

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W.McK. We might consider the priestly service of Christ to the saints in the epistle to the Hebrews. These passages provide encouragement for us and would have a strengthening effect in us as we take account of that service. That the Lord acted in a priestly way when He was here, even though He was not officially a priest, is clear from the gospels: His prayers and His priestly activities in feeding the multitude, and other events, would show that the Lord's priestly service really began in the days of His flesh. He will certainly act in a priestly way in the world to come because He will sit a Priest upon His throne, but His priestly service then will be of a different character because it will not be a question exactly of meeting need. The world to come will be largely free of need; God will introduce men in flesh and blood into eternal life conditions in an earthly sense and priesthood will have a different character; it will be largely a question of sustaining the earthly service of God in Israel and among the nations. But these passages in Hebrews refer especially to the Lord's priestly service currently, so it is instructive to consider how He is presented in each of the passages we have read.

In chapter 2 He is spoken of as a "merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God"; in chapter 4 He is "the great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God"; in chapter 6 He is spoken of as having entered in as the Forerunner, but as "a high priest according to the order of Melchisedec"; and in chapter 10 He is spoken of as "a great priest over the house of God". If we think of the bearing of these presentations of Christ on ourselves currently, in chapter 2 it is that He might help those that are being tempted, ourselves. In chapter 4 He is serving us as High Priest so that we should hold fast and have boldness to approach the throne of grace. In chapter 6 it is to lift our view from the earth to heaven because He has entered in within the veil as the Forerunner for us. If He is the Forerunner, there must be others coming after Him and those others include ourselves. The main point in the

Lord's priestly service in Hebrews is not to sustain us in the wilderness, but rather to bring us into the purpose of God. In chapter 10 it bears on our approach in the house of God. The house of God is what we have part in at the present time by faith and in the Spirit's power. What marks us is that we approach, which would have in view priestly service on our part as under the hand of the great Priest over the house of God. This leads not only to holding fast but also to our being able to stimulate one another. The apostle says, "provoking to love and good works", and then encouraging one another to assemble together. A vital feature of the house of God is that we assemble.

L.McF. I am sure what you are saying is of great importance. I thought that on our side entering into this thought of the priesthood necessitates the gift of the Holy Spirit. Is that right?

W.McK. Yes. We could not be priests without the gift of the Spirit. What passes for priesthood and priestly service in Christendom is anything but that, because it involves the denial of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The whole clerical system from which brethren withdrew at the beginning of the recovery of the truth showed that they seized the import of what you are saying. If God was to be served in a priestly way it had to be by persons who had faith and in whom the Spirit was free.

L.McF. So the Lord came into manhood; as it says, "Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like to his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God". That brings in the necessity of the incarnation and the Lord's service here amongst His own.

W.McK. As becoming Man, He became subject to all that affects us as believers save sin. But He came into a condition which meant that He could suffer. He also could become weary; we read that very thing, 'weary with the way He had come' (John 4: 6). So when we feel weary and think that it would be more comfortable to stay at home and relax, we think of the One who never thought of Himself and who would strengthen us that we might be filling out our priestly

part in the house of God. His priestly service here relates to those that are called His brethren. The Lord in becoming Man in all things was made like to His brethren. He was not made like to man in a general sense; the world is full of persons who are suffering because of their lawlessness, their violence, and their corruption. The Lord did not become Man to take on conditions like that. He came as entering into the conditions that affect those that have faith and have the Spirit. It says, "his brethren" and, as you read, "in things relating to God". The Lord's priestly service is not in things relating to the world or to the flesh or to self-will; it is in things relating to God.

A.S.H. I was thinking of the scripture where His relatives came to see Him and He looking around in a circuit said, These are my brethren, those who do the will of God (see Mark 3: 34).

W.McK. That fits in, because the Lord was not occupied with those who were His brethren naturally. Often we are detained a good deal from making spiritual progress by those that are related to us naturally but not spiritually. The Lord was thinking of those who were morally His brethren because they were doing the will of God. The teaching of Romans would underlie what is spoken of here. These persons who are called His brethren would be the product of the teaching of Romans, and the Lord has great sympathy with them because He knows that the whole scene is adverse to us. It even uses the word, "in that himself has suffered, being tempted". You remember that Matthew of the three synoptic gospels records that when the Lord was in the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, he says specifically, "And the tempter coming up to him said", Matt 4: 3. The tempter is especially against assemblyminded persons and I think that is why Matthew uses that title; Mark and Luke do not, "And the tempter coming up". And so the Lord would say to us individually or householdly, when the tempter comes up I know what that means and it is going to involve suffering for you to withstand him.

A.S.H. That was our subject on Thursday night; we were reading in Matthew that very chapter.

W.McK. Well, say some more about it.

A.S.H. I cannot add to it but what you are saying is timely. As it is brought forward it means that the Spirit is working and that things are coming together under God's timing.

W.McK. So the Lord has been that way, 'being tempted'. We know that it was morally impossible that He could yield to any temptation of the tempter and Matthew 4 shows that He did not. In fact Luke says, "And the devil, having completed every temptation, departed from him for a time", Luke 4: 13. The devil has a range of temptations and He will try those out on us, and what he will try out on young immature brethren is not what he will try out on older brethren who have been longer in the testimony. But the great point is that the Lord has been through the whole range of temptations and He is able to strengthen us, or, as it says, He is able to help those that are being tempted.

L.McF. I was thinking how in Genesis 3 the fruit from the forbidden tree was used to allure the woman, the man too; they both fell on account of yielding. But in the Lord's history we have One who could not yield, as you said.

W.McK. In Genesis 3 Satan did not exactly contradict what God had said, but he said, has God indeed said (v 1). He would get our minds working on natural lines about being regulated by the truth and by the present word of God. When that kind of crisis arises with any one of us, the Lord would draw near to help us so that we do not succumb to the temptation.

K.N.P. The Lord Himself drew on the word of God. Would that link with "things relating to God"? If we are concerned about the things relating to God, it would help us, do you think, in temptation to rely on the word of God to see us through?

W.McK. It would. And the word of God in its current bearing. Because the Lord said twice, It is written, and then He said, It is said. That would be what the Spirit is saying currently.

C.F.D. When the thought of the priest was originally brought in in the wisdom of God, it had in mind the sustaining of the people under difficult circumstances. I wondered whether the idea is seen in Moses and Aaron - Moses more what is apostolic and authoritative, but with Aaron, priesthood, which would have in mind the maintenance of things for God under difficult circumstances.

W.McK. Exactly. The wilderness was a very difficult place. Moses alludes to it as a great and terrible wilderness (Deut. 8: 15). It is a place where faith is tested to the utmost and where the flesh is fully exposed. In such surroundings and circumstances we need the priestly service of Christ to carry us through livingly in relation to serving God.

C.F.D. I wondered if the thought of serving God was like a terminus in view of which, in the service of the Lord in the wilderness setting of things - difficult circumstances, maintaining us there - holding us there, sustaining us in the will of God, He is preserving vessels having in view the service of God itself, in which, again, we have the priestly support of Christ.

W.McK. That is the point in Hebrews. While we are here in the wilderness, yet in relation to the true tabernacle (which we have in chapter 8) we are to be maintained in the service of God. Chapter 13 exhorts us to go forth to Him without the camp, bearing His reproach, and then rendering the fruit, or the calves, of our lips (Hos 14: 2), as though the service of God is to be enriched by persons who accept the limitations which the will of God requires, but who find that they are being richly supplied by the High Priest that we have.

K.N.P. Do you have something further in mind in "merciful and faithful high priest"?

W.McK. Feelings enter into this. It would run along, I think, with the expression in Corinthians that God will not suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear (1 Cor 10: 13). That is merciful. In Samson's history it says a young lion roared against him (Judg 14: 5). It was not a fullgrown lion - there was a certain mercy

in that - so at that early point in his history he was able to deal with that attack of the devil. The Lord as a merciful High Priest limits what He allows to come against us so that we are not overpowered. But then He is faithful, He is faithful to God and to the rights of God, and we must keep that in our minds.

K.N.P. It is not licence, there is no degrading in what is for God in the way in which things are approached, but mercy would relate to how much He allows against us. I was thinking about Job; certain limitations were put upon Satan in regard to his dealings with Job. Would that link with your thought?

W.McK. Yes it would, that there are limitations because the Lord is taking into account our spiritual stature and our spiritual strength. He said to Peter, I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not (Luke 22: 32). The Lord was merciful and faithful in that connection.

G.A. The beginning of John's gospel speaks about the children of God - "He came to his own and his own received him not; but as many as received him, to them gave he the right to be children of God, to those that believe on his name: who have been born, not of blood, nor of flesh's will, nor of man's will, but of God", John 1: 12,13. I was thinking of children of God; how does that fit in with what we have been saying about the Priest?

W.McK. That would link with what is said here about the seed of Abraham, "he takes hold of the seed of Abraham"; these are persons who are born of God, persons who have faith and they are therefore the seed of Abraham. But you can see that taking hold of the seed of Abraham by the hand involves sympathy and nearness. John 1 presents what we are as born of God, we derive our moral being from God, the Spirit using the word of God to bring that about, but then we are of the seed of Abraham, we are of the line of faith and the Lord is taking hold of us by the hand, which would involve sympathy.

L.D.P. In 2 Samuel 22, David says, "In my distress I called upon Jehovah, and I cried to my God; and he heard my voice out of his temple," v 7. I was thinking of that in relation to what we are saying

here as to a merciful and faithful High Priest, and David relating his cry to the temple. Would there be something in that?

W.McK. There would be, because in chapter 10 where we read, we have the house of God mentioned, which would include the temple. Therefore, David's cry, which was heard, relates to the sphere where God is. God has a habitation here in the Spirit and the persons who are functioning in that area can be assured that their cries will be heard.

C.F.D. It is interesting to note that when the children of Israel came out of Egypt God in His mercy led them by a route in which they were not exposed to the most difficult enemies. It was a protective move from God's side and most likely the children of Israel had no sense of what was happening, and yet it was really the priestly hand of God guiding them in a way that they would be able for, so they were not tempted above what they were able for.

W.McK. It is helpful to see that. He led them not by the way of Philistines. They would not have been equal to that because the Philistines being dealt with is a long way on in Israel's history. It comes after Moses has established the whole tabernacle system, after all the prophetic service of Samuel and the service of the judges and then David. It is under David that the Philistine is dealt with because there is spiritual maturity in the saints to deal with what the Philistine represents. Therefore it is in Ephesians that you get spiritual warfare in the heavenlies; you do not get that in Romans. God knows that the young believer has all he can do to contend with the flesh in himself, that is largely Romans. That is the enemy, Amalek, that we learn to overcome by the Spirit according to Romans. But Ephesians is the Philistine and there we come to what is collective, that in our localities we are shutting out the natural mind of man which would intrude into the things of God apart from the Spirit. Would you say that?

C.F.D. Yes. I think giving us that picture helps, because the warfare against the Philistine was very extended and it was at the latter time that David could look and see all his enemies, including the

Philistines, overcome, overpowered. I was wondering whether in our own histories we should be sensitive as to when we might need the priestly service of Christ? In my own working things out I do not know that I speak to the Lord in that particular way, and yet I am sure that what we are seeking from the Lord in the way of support is of priestly character.

W.McK. As long as we are down here in flesh and blood in the testimony, there is no moment when we do not need the priestly service of Christ. Even when are serving God on Lord's day morning following the Supper, we still need the priestly service of Christ, otherwise our minds are going to wander. There is never a moment at which we do not need the priestly service of Christ to keep us focused on what the Lord has before Him.

C.F.D. So when Moses is on the mount with Aaron and Hur. The war with Amalek, the flesh, is vitally important; it says there that the warfare with Amalek - with the flesh - will go on from generation to generation (Exod 17: 16). It is something with which we have to constantly come into combat, is it not?

W.McK. It is. And to be very simple about it, take the Lord at twelve years of age and what is He speaking about? He says, My Father's business. When you reach the age of twelve and fourteen and older there should come into your soul some feelings about your Father's business, your heavenly Father. The Lord is the model in that regard. You never find it recorded in the gospels that the Lord was out playing in the streets with other children. I am not saying that our children should not play with other children, I am not bringing in some legal thought, but I am trying to stimulate our interest in the model that Christ set before us, because He went through this whole line of things in order to help us at every stage of our Christian life.

A.S.H. I was thinking about the Lord going down to Nazareth and being subject to His natural parents. Does that shed light on what you are saying? It is not only that He said as to the will of His Father, wist ye not that I ought to be occupied in my Father's business? (Luke 2: 49) - that was at the early age of twelve - but

then He went down with His natural parents and was subject to them. Is there anything to that?

W.McK. Surely. Showing that the Lord as Priest would help our children to take on subjection to their parents. The world is full of insubject children, and I suppose any child, boy or girl, who loves Christ would say, well, I am not going to add to the number and would ask the Lord to help him or her to be marked by subjection, not by insubjection. Christianity is very simple and practical.

G.D.P. Our High Priest is able to help those that are being tempted. You were saying it is not official, but it is a moral order of things and the Lord is able to do it. Is that right?

W.McK. Yes. So in chapter 4, He is called a great High Priest and He has passed through the heavens. He is at the point of absolute supremacy under God. Jesus the Son of God; the Son of God means that He is on God's side and He has power, power to strengthen us. And so the exhortation is, "let us hold fast the confession"; the Son of God can give us power to hold fast. The tendency in every aspect of the world is to be loose, but to hold fast requires power and the Son of God has power, He can empower us.

D.McF. Would Stephen have a sense of this? He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

W.McK. He would. Undoubtedly in that time of extremity when his physical life was being destroyed, he proved the power of the Son of God as the great High Priest and he saw the heavens opened and he saw Jesus. By faith that is the view we have. No doubt it was literal with Stephen, with us it is by faith. So we have this word that we have a High Priest able to sympathize with our infirmities - not here with our sins or our self-will but our infirmities. The Lord knows what our measure is and the exhortation is, "Let us approach therefore with boldness to the throne of grace". We are in the time of grace, grace is on the throne. Whatever we need help about, grace is available.

L.McF. The reference to Stephen I thought was good. It says he knelt down and prayed, I am thinking of the priestly touch in the man

in his sufferings.

W.McK. How like his Master he was! We might say that short as his life and service were, nobody shines more brightly in the spirit of Christ in the New Testament than Stephen.

A.S.H. "Let us approach therefore with boldness", would that bring in the prayer meeting?

W.McK. I think so. If we are going to approach in the prayer meeting we would have to be there, would we not? We approach God individually, we approach Him householdly, but the "us" here would mean that the apostle is thinking about what we do collectively, "let us approach". Well, to do that, to put it simply, we have to be there.

L.McF. At the outset they persevered in the breaking of bread and prayers, as if it was one thing (Acts 2: 42). So that we want to persevere, do you think?

W.McK. We do; the Son of God would give us power to persevere and to endure. We come together for an hour to pray, but think of the Lord: He spent the night in prayer to God (Luke 6: 12). Do you think He was not tired after healing persons all day and feeding multitudes and walking in the hot sun? Recently I looked up out of interest to see how far it was from Judea to where the Lord was going when He had to go through Samaria. To get to Galilee was about 32 miles. No wonder He was weary with the way He had come. But He had time for that woman and see what a wonderful result there was. And the Lord would value our overcoming and spending an hour together to take up assembly interests, to be here in things relating to God.

Chapter 6 is to remind us that our place is really heaven, because it says of Jesus that He has entered into that within the veil; that is where He is, but He is there as Forerunner for us. Part of the Lord's priestly service is to remind us that heaven is our place. We sing that, do we not, 'Yon heaven is our home' (hymn 7). The Lord's priestly service is to maintain spiritual interest on our part about our

heavenly home and to lift us above the tendency that marks us all naturally to earthly-mindedness. Is that all right to say?

L.McF. Yes, that is helpful. "As forerunner for us, become for ever a high priest according to the order of Melchisedec." Say something about the Melchisedec priesthood, please.

W.McK. Is that not another feature of the glory of Christ as Priest? It is not a priesthood that terminates by death but He is Priest in the power of an indissoluble life, that is it is life out of death. His priesthood involves eternal life. His service to us is that we might enjoy eternal life more and more, especially as we are together when we are free of ordinary, legitimate matters. What eternal life is in the heavenly sense in which it belongs to the assembly should be our portion.

L.McF. So that what came out there in Aaron's rod, how it blossomed and bloomed would illustrate what you are saying, and what was in the mind of God, no doubt, was typically seen in Aaron.

W.McK. So his rod brought out the power of life out of death, did it not, and how quickly it showed itself? The staves were laid up overnight before Jehovah and overnight you have the full result in Aaron's rod, ripened almonds, showing, as we are affected by the priestly service of Christ, how quickly what is mature may develop in us.

K.N.P. Is there something in the fact that it is "Jesus is entered as forerunner"? In chapter 4 it is "Jesus the Son of God".

W.McK. It would seem to emphasise His personality and personal attractiveness, the name Jesus alluding to that. It is His personal name.

K.N.P. I wondered that. Suffer little children to come to me and I will bless them. It is attractive, is it not? Sometimes, specially in Christendom, the priest is not someone to whom people would go normally, but Jesus the great High Priest is One that is attractive to us, is He not?

W.McK. Exactly. So taking little children in His arms He blessed them, and I think the note in Mark says He blessed them abundantly (Mark 10: 16). It is what the Lord as Priest has in mind for our children; whatever their ages are, He wants to bless them abundantly. That involves they are to come into fellowship and they are to have part in the service of the house of God, but they are to have the enjoyment of eternal life. The real answer for our younger brethren and our children to what they surrender in the world is that they enjoy eternal life.

K.N.P. I was thinking about that in relation to Melchisedec, "neither beginning of days nor end of life"; there is something there that goes on for ever, but there is something that can be enjoyed today by us in the power of the Spirit? Maybe you can help us as to how we can help one another to enjoy that. We speak about it, but how do we help one another to enjoy it?

W.McK. I think essentially by manifesting our love to one another. Psalm 133 shows that where Jehovah commanded the blessing was where brethren were dwelling together in unity, and the anointing oil was flowing down in its benign influence on the whole position. So in a locality, yours or ours or Plainfield, where the brethren are unified in affection for Christ and where the Spirit is known as dignifying them - because the oil flowed down, it is not a static rigid order of things - it points to the activity of life and life finds its expression in love. The way we help one another is alluded to in chapter 10, provoking one another to love and good works. It might seem like a strange word to use, provoking one another to love, but I suppose it means that we are insistent, we persist in it. Somebody who provokes you keeps at something. The idea is that we are persistent, we are insistent on promoting love among ourselves. That is what makes way for the enjoyment of eternal life.

L.McF. In that context it says "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together". I think we need to take account of that point; that is the sphere in which the blessing is flowing down as the saints are assembled. Is that right?

W.McK. Exactly. And so when the saints are assembled, we want to be there. David said, One thing have I desired, and what he desired was to dwell in the house of Jehovah and to behold His beauty in His temple (Ps 27: 4). Well, we would like to encourage one another or provoke one another in love to get on to that line.

L.D.P. In 1 Samuel it says that "her adversary", that is Peninnah, "provoked her much" (chap 1: 6). Sometimes what is against us can provoke us to enter into the enjoyment of what God has in mind for us.

W.McK. No doubt Hannah found that very testing. Peninnah had children, Hannah did not, and Peninnah became an adversary and provoked her. But Hannah's recourse was to God and her feelings entered into it. When Eli misunderstood her, she said "I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit". Well, we do not want to provoke one another to cause sorrowful spirits, but we want to provoke to love, which means that we are together without fear of one another and we are not in a critical spirit and there is liberty and what there is for God can be brought out freely.

C.F.D. Therefore the idea of provoking each other to good works would be that you set the thing on yourself. We want to encourage each other along these lines on which you are speaking. Well, let me be one who locally sets the thing on. That would not only be the principle of leadership, but it would be showing that I have in my heart affection for the house of God. You spoke about David - I think we need affection for the local assembly, so that in effect we are marrying the local assembly, we are married to it.

W.McK. I think it is important to see that. The local assembly becomes precious to you and you are going to sacrifice yourself to build it up and enrich it and to strengthen the saints as seeking to go on not only in the recognition of the rights of God but also in the privilege of serving God.

G.D.P. In the sixth chapter you have that verse "strong encouragement"; that is from God's side. Now in our chapter, it is encouraging one another. Do you not think that is helpful, the matter

of encouragement? You have been speaking about things we have to surrender or forego, but there is encouragement for us, do you not think?

W.McK. There is. So I suppose ultimately we learn everything from God, but from Christ. So God gives us a strong encouragement. I am sure that anybody who loves the local assembly would greatly desire to be able to strongly encourage his local brethren in regard of these matters. We learn from Christ how to do that.

G.D.P. We had 'entering into that which is within the veil'. How do we go about entering into the holy of holies?

W.McK. The holy of holies is really the presence of God in Christ, or, if we say it another way, it is Christ in the presence of God. When you enter in there, what you see is Christ. You are in a realm that is entirely of God. That is accessible to us by faith and by the Spirit. And we need not have any hesitation in entering in, the word is "by the blood of Jesus". Nothing is going to come up in the way of a question as we enter in.

A.S.H. It says that Jesus was made a mercy-seat for us through faith in His blood.

W.McK. In Romans 3 it says, "God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood," v 25. He is that, God has set Him forth to show what His disposition is to all men, that He is exercising His rights in mercy and the evidence of it is that Christ is risen and glorified, and God is setting Him forth as the One in whom His thoughts for men are expressed.

C.F.D. In the old dispensation Aaron was the only one who had access to the holy of holies. Does that not point up the wonderful day in which we live, that collectively we have access, but then individually we have access at any time into the holy of holies, into the presence of God; that way has been made open to us. It seems to me that this is all part of the encouragement which would stimulate our hearts to be together collectively as much as we possibly can.

W.McK. I would think so. The more we are accustomed to going in individually the more we shall want to be together to go in collectively. When Moses went in to speak to God it says, "he heard the voice speaking to him from off the mercy-seat", Num 7: 89. Later, of David it says, he went in and sat before Jehovah (2 Sam 7: 18). It was typically the liberty of sonship in the holiest and he was occupied with Christ and with God. And that is what the holiest is, you go in in the liberty of sonship because that underlies our priesthood and you are occupied with Christ and with God in Christ. It is a wonderful contemplation.

C.F.D. Do you see the priesthood of Christ going through into eternity?

W.McK. I think His mediatorial service will go through, but, as you know, priesthood contemplates what is unholy and adverse, and in the new creation realm of the eternal day there will not be anything like that. So we shall not need a merciful and faithful high priest in eternity, nor shall we need an advocate with the Father, because it will be bright and blessed scenes where sin can never come, as J.N.D. says (Hymn 64). But we will need the mediatorial service of Christ and the Spirit eternally because God remains God and we remain men. Do you think so?

C.F.D. Yes, I do. And the principle of administration will go through in Christ but it will be the administration of love, everything sustained on that level. In regard to the place divine Persons have taken, do we see that our glorified bodies will gain be the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will indwell the glorified body?

W.McK. Exactly. The Spirit will be the life of the glorified body. In the flesh and blood body the blood is the life, but in the body of glory the Spirit will be the life. That is a wonderful thought that the Spirit is known as life now on account of righteousness but He will be life and power in our bodies of glory eternally for the unalloyed enjoyment of the presence of Christ and of God.

NEW YORK

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Key to initials

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CHRISTIANITY MARKED BY WHAT IS GREAT

Paul Martin

Hebrews 4: 14-16; Ephesians 1: 16-23; Hebrews 2: 1-4

I would like to say a word as to Christianity characterised by what is great. We are accustomed to what is small, and we are not to despise the day of small things. There is blessing in accepting it. All that has been committed into man's hand has broken. That has been so in every dispensation, but what marks out Christianity in its distinctiveness is that it is characterised by what is great. When the Lord Jesus came in, it says "He shall be great, and shall be called Son of the Highest", Luke 1: 32? Immediately it says, "He shall be great", not that He shall be greater than what had gone before, He is beyond compare. He came in in that way. This epistle to the Hebrews is a book of contrasts in which we have what is better, "better hope", "better promises", better than what had gone before. But when you come to Jesus He is great. Oh the greatness of the Person of the Lord Jesus who gives character to the whole of the dispensation and the whole of what God will secure. Think of Him in His Person! Think of the glory of who was here as He moved, One who could say, "Before Abraham was I am", John 8: 38, the One who could say "I am", and "they went away backward and fell to the ground", John 18: 6, the glory and majesty and power of the One who was here! There had never been a man here like that before. How glorious! "God manifest in flesh, Oh wonder of His universe!" (Hymn 400). How great the incarnation! And yet great not only because of who He was - that must infinitely and always be so - but great as you ponder the order of that humanity that was here in moral perfection. His moral excellence, perfection, was great, the One who could speak to that woman at Sychar's well. Who else could have unfolded to her heart, exposing it to her but unfolding also what was in His heart that might satisfy hers? Who could have done that but the One who was here? Then the woman in chapter 8 of John, think of the glory of the One who could say, "Neither, do I condemn thee", v 11. Who else could have done that? Coming to

that man in chapter 9: "Thou, dost thou believe on the Son of God? ... And he said, I believe, Lord: and he did him homage", v 35,38. Think of Him finding one man who had been cast out, associating him with Himself in relation to another world altogether. How great He is!

Some of us were speaking last night about the manna and the oblation. It says as to the manna it was "fine, granular", Exod 16: 14. It lay upon the face of the wilderness. Think of the fineness of the manna and the fineness of the oblation, merging in Jesus, an oblation of fine flour mingled with oil. They merged in the glory of His Manhood. The manna was round, granular. There were no rough edges, if I might speak reverently, in relation to the humanity of Jesus. And the oblation was fine. Everything there for God was held in absolute perfection. His righteousness, His love, His holiness, His sympathy for man, His longing for the heart of God, all was held in absolute perfection. Mr Darby says, "I hesitate to speak as to balance in relation to Jesus, but He was perfect". Was He not great? That order of humanity that came in, was it not great? It is great still. "He shall be great". Oh, let us feast our souls upon that order of humanity! For the Israelite the manna ceased, but for us, the manna, let it not cease! Let it become the food as we are going through the wilderness, that might form us in the features of that perfect manhood, that the features of Jesus, the spirit of the Lord Jesus, might become manifest in our pathways as we move here. We often excuse ourselves. We say, Oh, that is Mr So-and-so, you have to take him as he is. What about the Lord Jesus? Let us feast upon the perfection of that blessed Man! As I say, for us the manna does not cease but along with it goes the old corn of the land and the other food that is so available to us because of the One who is there at God's right hand.

I have read as to His priesthood: "Having therefore a great high priest". Israel were conscious of the high priest. He was ordained for his service but we never actually see him functioning in his service, not in its fulness, but the Lord Jesus has never ceased to function in the wonderful service as the "great" high priest. We have

such a great high priest. How great He is! Think of all the scriptures from Genesis to Malachi, all speaking of Christ. It says, "he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself", Luke 24: 27. You can imagine those two, if I am not fanciful, going back on their journey, saying to one another, I never thought we would see His glory in Genesis. But now they would see it there. I never realised that His glory was being spoken of in Exodus. I never realised it was the glory of the One who had come in that was for God's pleasure that was being spoken of in Leviticus, but they would have seen the whole of the Scriptures in a light in which they had never seen them before. What a Man! Is He not great, beloved? Oh, dear young person, I would appeal to you, how do you stand in your link and relation with the One who is there tonight at God's right hand? He has "set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high". That is Hebrews 1 verse 3 - not on the right hand of the throne of God, but "on the right hand of the greatness on high". How morally great, how excellent the place that Christ has! And He has you, and He would hold you in relation to Himself where He is. I would say to you, it is not an insignificant path into which you have been called. God has in His heart for man "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, but God has revealed to us by his Spirit", 1 Cor 2: 9. We have been speaking of the necessity of making way for the Spirit of God day by day in our relations together and the Spirit, day by day, would give you a greater appreciation, give me a greater appreciation, of the things that are in the heart of God for man. How great they are!

We have "a great high priest who has passed through the heavens". I do not know how many heavens there are. Paul was caught up to the third heaven, but Solomon says, "the heavens, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee", 1 Kings 8: 27. But think of how great this Person is! He has passed through all the heavens. It has been said He filled every heaven through which He passed. How wondrous He is! Who else could fill the heavens, but

He fills them all. Think of the angelic beings seeing Him go up, passing through one heaven then through another. He passed through them all. He is greater than the whole created sphere. He Himself brought it into existence. But it is that blessed Person, so great and so glorious, who is our great high priest. He has sympathy and He has feeling. He has been "tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart". Think of the perfection of Jesus! Often we are tempted by things because we have allowed sin to work. He was tempted in all things but sin apart. He felt all that had come in upon humanity and He carried it in His spirit and it affected Him in His spirit, one might say reverently. But He was sinless. All that was working in the system of the world through which He passed had no place in the heart of Jesus. What a great High Priest! And he knew what man was feeling. He knew the sorrows of mankind. He knew the weakness of man, weak, mortal man. He knew that. Think of the feelings that He has and as we draw near to the throne - it is not exactly that we draw near to the Priest; it is not exactly the Priest that gives us strength, the strength is coming from the throne tonight. How wonderful to be conscious of it. You come into the presence of God feeling how weak you are, maybe in your testimony at school or in the office, you come before the throne of grace and find that there is One there and there on your behalf before God and He is there that you might prove and I might prove all the resources of strength and grace that are flowing from the throne to sustain persons who are seeking to be here in God's testimony. It is there that the resources are flowing because there is a Man there, such a great High Priest.

In Ephesians I wanted to touch on the greatness of the saints. Paul uses superlative language in this epistle, especially in this chapter. He says, "being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints". Think of God having an inheritance! Paul says on Mars hill, "nor is served by men's hands as needing something", Acts 17: 25. In His absolute deity He needs nothing from man, but His heart has looked for an

answer where He could dwell. It says in the Psalm, "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell..." Ps 132: 14. He is going to dwell amidst His people. It says in Revelation, "and he shall tabernacle with them... and God himself shall be with them, their God", chap 21: 3. Think of the glory of what God will enter into in relation to His people, that He will find in the saints an answer that speaks to Him of Christ in those formed features that have been wrought out through conditions of suffering, through conditions of weakness here, and yet going on quietly in dependence with God, conditions wrought out so that the features of Jesus have come into expression. God says it is His inheritance. How great the saints are! When you come to an occasion like this, you may not think too highly of the saints. I tell you, you are in the greatest company that there has ever been on earth, the company of those who are God's inheritance. How dignified they are! How exalted! We stand up here on a platform but really we should be down there. The saints are so great. Any that serve serve in the light of the exalted character of the work of God in the saints and the servant is never greater. Think of the Lord Jesus coming in: "For also the Son of man did not come to be ministered to, but to minister, and give his life a ransom for many", Mark 10: 45. What a model we have in the Person of the Lord Jesus! He came in to serve others. He came in as a bondman. But when we think of the saints and the excellent that are upon the earth we are thinking of the glory of what is for God. Think of the glory of His work! It struck me in the week that the work of God in the saints here today will be no different when it is translated, save that it will have a body that is suited to it. Oh the value that is in a company like this: how great the saints are!

Paul in writing to the Corinthians where there was very much that had to be put right and matters that we would shrink from - thankfully matters that we are not accustomed to amongst us - speaks to them in the light of what they are to God. In speaking of the saints, in holding them in our affections, let us always remember what they are to God: they are His inheritance. I remember once speaking of a certain brother and my father said to me, You know,

you will get the greatest help if you speak to the brethren about the Lord and speak to the Lord about the brethren. I think there is a lot in that. I have proved it to be so, to speak to the Lord about the saints and speak to the saints about the Lord.

In Hebrews 2 I want to touch on this "great salvation". There is a peculiar bearing in these passages in Hebrews on the Jewish believers. Salvation was much in the mind of the Israelite. The Lord says that to the woman in John 4? "for salvation is of the Jews", v 22. Therefore, this passage has a peculiar bearing on the Jewish believers to whom the apostle wrote, but it does not stop there. It has a bearing on us too for "Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness", 2 Tim 3: 16. Paul in writing to the Hebrews says there is what had been spoken of before by angels and those that did not receive the word received just retribution. That was the dispensation in which they lived. How solemn it was! But in our day as we are often reminded, grace reigns through righteousness, but it is equally solemn because we are dealing with what is so great. In chapter 1 we have the Speaker: God has spoken; in chapter 2 we have the speaking, and the speaking has come and there has been much that we have heard. Think of what has come out through the Lord Jesus personally, and the words of the Lord Jesus stand in their own distinctiveness. Paul says, "and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus", Acts 20: 35: they stand in their own distinctiveness. But then there is what has come through the apostles and what has come right down to the present day. In the 1800s the Lord in His grace brought in recovery to light that had been there all the time, and opened it up in its glory. That light affected the whole of Christendom and persons throughout the whole earth in various denominations began to be affected by the glory of what had come in in Christ as the exalted Head and the assembly here. It had an effect upon the whole of Christendom. The truth as to the Lord's coming and the rapture also had a universal effect upon believers. These were great things. Persons were meeting night after night, sitting round the dining table, households enquiring into the truth

because it was so great. They had never heard it before. They did not realise. Light fresh to them dawned on their souls. Nothing else mattered to them. There was the Head in heaven and the body was here and they laid hold of it in faith and their whole life was regulated by it. Persons gave up high callings. Some of the nobility of this world laid it aside for the moment. It did not matter because Christ was there and His body was here. What wondrous light has come right down, but as it came it gradually in the eyes of those that heard it began to be common and of no regard and many alas! have fallen away.

I want just to touch on this because we have been in the presence of what has been so great. It had its origin in what the Lord said Himself and then it has come right down. Paul says to Timothy, "And the things thou hast heard of me ... these entrust to faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also", 2 Tim 2: 2. It has come right down, and that truth remains. You may say to me, are you saying it is in this company? I am speaking of the truth as it has come down. It is for you to prove that it is here in this company. The brethren, I think, will understand what I mean in that. I know where I have found it and I believe most of us here know where we have found it. But alas! there is a danger, even in a company like this of becoming "negligent of so great salvation". There is a danger of becoming negligent, that the light that dawned on these men in the eighteen hundreds in all its fervour, and regulated their lives, maybe has lost something of its shine and its glory and maybe it has become second place; other things have taken priority. Let us not be negligent! It is not that here the Hebrews are turned away from it. It is that they were not handling what had come to them, the great salvation, in the light of the glory and the splendour and the greatness that had been made known. It had lost its glory to them. May it not lose its glory to any of us here. We are in a day of small things but let the day of small things not take away from us the glory of what exists and is maintained because Christ is on high and the Spirit is here. I feel so much the danger for myself of saying that everything is broken down and we

will do the best that we can, and we may be negligent of so great salvation. You hear it said sometimes in relation to matters that come up, Oh well, we did the best we could in the circumstances. If we are desirous of keeping a place clean for the Lord, all the resources of the throne are available to us. What is done in each local company should reflect the glory of the One who is sustaining the whole system for God.

He says, "how shall we escape if we have been negligent of so great salvation, which, having had its commencement in being spoken of by the Lord, has been confirmed to us by those who have heard". Think of the glory of what has come down! You say, Well, we are not in the apostles' days today. And we are not, we are not in the apostles' days, but the glory of what came out through the apostles is not gone, the light, the truth that was made known at such a moment at the early days of the dispensation has not gone.

I might refer to what impressed me on Lord's Day. Immediately the Lord says I am about to spue that system out of His mouth, John says, "... I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven..." There was the throne and One sitting on it and the rainbow around it-the faithfulness of God has not changed - and twenty-four thrones and twenty-four elders. The whole system was there in all its glory and Christ was the Centre of it. Think of the greatness of what has been carried through! Even though there may have been, and there has been, the greatest departure, we can by the Spirit touch a realm into which that departure has never entered because Christ is sustaining everything for God. I would appeal to you, especially my dear young brethren, get a touch of that world where everything is sustained tonight for the pleasure of God and you will find how great it is! There is no greatness in the world in which we are. People aspire to greatness: they promote themselves. Let us be careful of those features, the egotistic man. You learn about him when you go on these business courses, young people, the egotistic man. "Push yourself forward!" "Make much of yourself"! When you tread through such a scene, keep feeding on the manna because there is another order of man, not the man who promoted himself, but the

Man who went down, down. How low He went! But God exalted Him because of His moral excellence that shone in His humility. Mr Darby says:

"Oh lowliness, how feebly known," (Hymn 138)

Would that I knew more of it, "... lowliness, how feebly known". I so often stick up for my own opinion, even my own judgment. Scripture says "submitting yourselves to one another", Eph 5: 21. You may have a judgment about something and it may be absolutely right, but do not forget to listen to what your brother says also. Submit yourself! Oh lowliness! It does not mean you surrender what is right. It means that in grace you may be prepared for adjustment. Who of us does not need it? We may see things in a certain light but who of us does not need adjustment and we shall need it all the way home because at the best we only see things in part. Soon we shall know as we are known, known in fulness, but at the moment we see things in part.

May the Lord help us! We are standing in relation to what is great, not in relation to what man has set up or what man has maintained. That is all broken. But we are in relation to what is being sustained by a glorious Man on high, all power having been given to Him in heaven and on earth. How great He is! And the Spirit of God is here sustaining an answer that will be for the divine pleasure eternally. May we be exercised to take up our part in it for His Name's sake.

GRANGEMOUTH

28 January 1995

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Peter Mutton

Revelation 18: 1,2; 10-13; 17-19; Matthew 27: 45-54; 14: 23-33

I am sure we were all very much impressed by the savagery of the earthquake in Kobe in Japan, and this scripture came to me in that connection - in one hour great Babylon is fallen. Now, Japan is not fallen, neither is Kobe - it will be reconstructed - but it is the tremors which went out from Kobe that are of interest. As you will know, Japan is a vast industrial power. Its importance in the world of commerce far exceeds its physical shape and size, and there was immediate speculation as to what would happen, that those Japanese investors who had invested in Britain and in Europe and in the United States and elsewhere would be having to withdraw their money to fund the redevelopment of Kobe, the cost of which would run into billions and billions of yen. In one hour so much can happen unexpectedly and traumatically. Nobody was expecting to have an earthquake in Kobe and yet it came in its severity. The very buildings which had been designed to withstand it had never been tested. They could never be. And, of course, when the earthquake came, they revealed their fragility. We have all seen the pictures, I am sure, of the double-decker highway which was turned on its side, of the building, where the research was done into earthquakes, which lay across the road. Men are unprepared for the severity of a little shake. I am not under-estimating the shake, but it is as nothing to what will happen where we read in the book of Revelation. The whole commercial system is represented for us in Babylon. You may say, Babylon is gone; it is finished. You may think it is but it is not. The great city Babylon represents commerce, commerce which is for the aggrandisement of those who trade, and you may not have noticed, but that is the philosophy of the world today. That is, what runs the world today is commerce, no longer social engineering and social ownership, but the free market. I am not preaching about the market: it is very boring, but sufficient to say that in one hour it will be over.

Dear friend, I will not be here and those who love the Lord Jesus and wait His appearing will not be here to see the great devastation. You may be, I do not know. You may be part of it, but if you love Jesus as I love Jesus, you will not be. The gospel is rescuing men from a certain calamity which is coming - in *one hour*. God in His goodness demonstrates the power of an earthquake. He has demonstrated it in San Francisco. He has demonstrated it in Kobe. But it is as nothing to the great collapse of the whole system which men have built.

We were reading the other weekend of Samson's death. It is a remarkable thing to read and to contemplate. Samson asked the little boy who led him to let him put his hands on the two pillars of the Philistine house. The Philistine would represent something else: the fleshly mind of man in the things of God, perhaps, the human intellect seeking to take ground which actually belonged to God's people, belonged to God and His own, and he felt the pillars and identified with them and he bowed himself and the whole structure came down. What were those two pillars? I believe those two pillars represent two things upon which the world is built, the whole structure of men's life which they have organised for themselves without God and without a future: one is lust and the other is pride. That is what it is structured on. And it will fall in one hour just as that house fell. They thought they had the man who for a time had represented God, the man of whom they were afraid, and they thought, we have finished with him; we have put out his eyes; we have cut off his hair; he cannot see and he has no power. Ah, but he strengthened himself in God and the whole thing came down. It will come down so easily. One man with a little power is sufficient, it is seen in Philadelphia: "thou hast a little power", Rev 3: 8. Thank God for the little power. We cannot talk about much, but it is sufficient.

I do not want to alarm you about the end but we need to understand that God is coming in in judgment upon the world. And what is the issue that God has against the world that He should do this thing, that He should finish the systems that are extant, both the commercial and the religious systems which will continue after the

church has gone? What is the issue that God has? It is because His own Son was rejected. Often we hear about sins in the gospel and we have to do with God about our sinful state without Christ. God is interested in more than your sins. He is interested in you accepting His Son. His Son came to save the world and the world crucified Him. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34. God is not holding you personally responsible exactly, but He is inviting you to accept His Son in the face of opposition, in the face of indifference, because God is not indifferent to Jesus. He has announced that there is one name given under heaven whereby we must be saved - dear friend, must be saved. It is imperative. It is laid upon me, it is my responsibility to tell you about the way that God has ordained that you must be saved. And how easy it is to close with the salvation, to close with the blessing that God is offering in Jesus.

We read of the basis of the gospel, the death of Jesus at Calvary. We have previously spoken about and contemplated the life of Jesus in His perfection, His names and His titles and His glories. But here in the gospel, I suppose, first, we present Jesus, Jesus the Man, Jesus the Saviour, the One who came "to seek and to save that which is lost", Luke 19: 10. He came to all and the majority rejected Him; "but as many as received him, to them gave he the right to be children of God", John 1: 12. Are you in that category? There are only two categories for mankind, those who have Christ and those who do not; those who have accepted Him as their Saviour and those who have refused, only two categories. And the outcome of those two categories is as clear. There is only one basis whereby we must be saved. There is only one revealed way, only one Name given. Do not be deluded! There are many people in Christendom who think they have earned a passage to heaven on the basis of their work. Maybe they built a hospital. Maybe they gave their life to charity. But there is only one name given. It is not the name of Peter Mutton; it is not your name; it is not the name of the biggest philanthropist in the world; it is the name of Jesus.

Nobody could begin to do what He did. And God will not tolerate that suggestion or thought.

Here we see the end of the life of Jesus as a Man in flesh and blood. He says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" There was no answer. Why had God forsaken Jesus? Why was there no answer? There had always been an answer. He could say "Father ... thou always hearest me", John 11: 42. The cry of Jesus was always answered. He had only to ask the Father and it would happen, not in an hour but in an instant. And suddenly it had all changed. For three hours there was no answer. There was no answer because He was made sin. The sins of the whole world were laid upon Him there, and God could not look. He could not answer because He is a holy, sin-hating God, and the face of a loving God was turned away from His loved Son as there He made a full end to the matter before God. And there was darkness, dreadful, appalling darkness. Dear friend, you may be in darkness. Do you feel it in your soul? Do you feel maybe you belong to Babylon, you belong to an order of things which God is going to judge. Maybe you feel God is out to 'get' you, to judge you, for your sins. Ah, no! Jesus was judged for your sins. God is not holding your sins against you. He just wants you to accept His Son in simplicity. You may say, well I do not understand some of the things that are talked about in the meetings. That will come in time. Just accept Him as the Man that God has appointed as Saviour, the name that has been given under heaven whereby we must be saved.

And here we see an earthquake. You hear His cry. The words are not given. In another gospel He cries, "It is finished", John 19: 30. What was finished? Some have attempted to say what was finished. Scripture does not say what was finished but so many things finished. Yes! so many things were finished, and so many things were begun in the death of Jesus and in His resurrection too. My sins were finished. When He cried, "It is finished", my sins had been dealt with and I am clear of them, the sins of the whole world borne there and God can be propitious towards men. The life of Jesus, in flesh and blood, was finished. It was over. No man took

His life from Him. Men attempted to murder Jesus at Calvary. They crucified the Lord of glory but they did not kill Him. He gave up His own life. It was a loud cry. It was not the last groan of a dying man. It was the cry of a Man who went out in victory having said to the matter of sins and having endured the consuming judgment - but He Himself was not consumed. The bush burned, you will remember - Moses saw it - but it was not consumed, but the time of judgment was passed and the light appeared. There were three hours of darkness. Babylon falls in one hour, but there were three hours in which Jesus was made sin. Dreadful, dreadful time!

There were those who were there and saw it. There were those hardened men who had seen many a crucifixion. The centurion was one. He said, "Truly this man was Son of God". Truly He was. You did not need to be a Roman centurion at the cross of Jesus to know it. He was the Son of God. There was every sign and every miracle. Maybe you want signs; maybe you want miracles. Jesus has a word for you. He says, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it save the sign of Jonas the prophet", Matt 12: 39. What was the sign of Jonas? Do you young people know about Jonah? The sign of Jonah was that he was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights and at the end of it the miracle happened. Jonah came out on to dry land, spewed up by the fish, and there he was alive when everybody else thought he was dead. Jesus came out of death, the Victor. It could not hold Him because He Himself had done nothing worthy of death. If I brought my sins before God, if I had had no Saviour, if I had had no Substitute, I would never have survived, but Jesus, the holy Man, was the perfect sacrificial lamb. John the Baptist says, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", John 1: 29. There is nothing wrong with Him. He was perfect. Every step that He took was perfect. You could dissect it and analyse it and you would find nothing. You read about men coming into high office and the newspapers start to look for all the flaws in their public life. If he is in politics, 'he must have done something shady' or if he is in high

office, 'there must be something to be found' and surely eventually they find it, even if he did not pay his parking ticket or whatever. But with Jesus, nothing. They came to Him and said, What about the tribute money? He was under no obligation to pay it, but He paid it. Whatever He did, you could examine it and find no fault in Him.

Even the thief on the cross next to Him said, "This man has done nothing amiss". It came to him in a flash that Jesus was perfect and that he was not. And he says, "Remember me, Lord". Remember me. And what does Jesus say to him? 'You have gone too far', or, 'There is no hope for you'. He says, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise", Luke 23: 41-43. He does not say anything about his sins. But He knew all about them. Jesus knew all about his sins, but he did not refer to them because the man himself had had a judgment about them. He had finished with his wicked history and he says, We are suffering justly, but the big thing was he had accepted the Saviour: "This man has done nothing amiss". "Remember me, Lord". Remember me. And that day he was in paradise. But Jesus went before. He was in paradise before him. He was preparing the way for the reception of that thief on the cross. There is hope for a thief; there is hope for you, dear friend. There is nothing you have done that is so bad that you cannot be saved. Maybe Satan would suggest it. I have often said it, and I am sure others too - there are two lies that he uses. One is that you are so good you do not really need a Saviour. You have not done anything bad so why all this talk about salvation and saving you from your sins? And the second is that you are so bad that there is no hope. And they are both lies. He is the father of lies. He will do what he can to deceive you about your condition. You may be lost but there is no need to be because you can be found.

We read finally in Matthew. We have been going back and back in time. Here before the Lord's death, we have the Lord's life. It is maybe some comfort, dear friend, dear brother, dear sister, dear young person, you may know the Lord. You may have accepted Him as your Saviour. Peter had, and many others had. Peter it was who said "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", Matt 16: 16. He

had accepted Jesus and he had accepted his own sinful history. You remember, he fell down at the time of the miracle of the fishes he fell at the Lord's knees and he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord", Luke 5: 8. But he would not let Him go. Do not let Him go, dear friend! He will not go anyway. He says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord". If you have never said it, say it now. Say it in your heart to God, but He will not depart from you. He has come to find you. You will not need to go anywhere to find Jesus. He has come to find you. He has made the journey. That was why He was here as a man and He humbled Himself as a man to go even into death for you. It is He who has been looking for you. The search is over. Jesus was known to Peter. He had received him and he still had his doubts, still had his moments. Maybe you have been having a moment of doubt. We all have our moments. We are assailed by Satan, these doubts, these storms, these fears, these tempests. Maybe you have a tempest in your work, a tempest in your private life, a tempest in your conscience, a tempest in your relationships, a tempest in your home. How many things that come that unsettle us and frighten us. The first thing that frightened them was this apparition. They did not see the Lord in it. Peter and the others in the boat were afraid because the circumstance was beyond their experience and so many happenings in life are things we have never experienced before. Often the thing we have never done before is the thing that frightens us the most. But here they see Jesus coming to them. He wanted to come to them and to come into the boat and they were afraid. It may be that you are afraid of the commitment, of having Jesus in the boat. It is only because you misunderstand Him. It is only because you have misapprehended what He wants to do for you in your life. You may say, Well, if I have Jesus in my boat, what will my friends say? What will my colleagues say? If I start becoming spiritual and talking about Jesus and I am no longer interested in all the things they are interested in, I am going to have a rough time. It was not the case in this boat, of course they were His disciples. But we have all known what it is to be afraid of the commitment to having Jesus in our lives, have we not? We all have to be honest. We have all been there. But He

says, Do not be afraid; it is I. He only wants the best for us. He wants to give you life. He says, "I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly", John 10: 10. He wants you to live in the life which He was going to enter into, His risen life. And more than that, He wants to empower you with the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is gone, but another Comforter has come to us. What He did in His death was for our good. What He did in His resurrection was for our good. And from His ascended place with the Father, after those intervening days, the Holy Spirit came and He is still here. There is only one way for the believer to live and that is in the power of the Holy Spirit. Have you the Holy Spirit? If you have been obedient, if you have answered to the call, I am sure you do. But if you are in any doubt, ask. To him who asks shall be given. If you are not aware of the power of the Holy Spirit in your life, ask! It will at least mean that you have a bit of exercise about it. You say, Well, how am I going to carry on? how am I going to survive? I am going to get a lot of brickbats, a lot of difficulties. I can see the problems. You need an indwelling power. Take the woman at the well in Samaria, the Lord did not go on to her about her sins. He said, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water", John 4: 10, water which springs up into eternal life. He was not threatening her. He was not warning her. He was saying, If you just knew the opportunity, you would have asked Me, asked Me for something I want to give you. There are things we have to ask for. God is saying, I want to see some desire, some interest. I have plenty to give you, but I want you on My side first. The things He has are very precious and He is not scattering them to people with no interest. Where there is an interest, He will warm that interest until it becomes an all-consuming interest.

Here He calls to them, and Peter wanted to go to Jesus: "Lord, if it be thou, command me to come to thee". The Lord is doing that. He is calling you to come, not exactly commanding you to come although He is Lord. No! He is far too gracious for that. He never thrusts Himself on you. In another gospel it looked as though He

was going to go by them (Mark 6: 48). What He is looking for is the invitation. Remember in Revelation in Laodicea He says, "Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking", Rev 3: 20. He says, I want you to hear the knock and to open the door. I want you to make that move. The Lord is not thrusting Himself on you. He is not forcing you into something you are not ready for. He is graciously waiting. God on the other hand commands men everywhere to acknowledge the name of Jesus. It becomes something which is obligatory. Every knee will bow to Him "of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings", Phil 2: 10. It will be so. God will have it, and He is justified in doing it. But Jesus in this day of grace, here He is, He is open to the invitation. And Peter says, "Command me to come to thee..." The Lord had the power to walk on the water, to be supported by something which is insubstantial in itself. He was superior to the circumstances and elements, and He is superior to the circumstances and elements in your life. Whatever the troubles are, He is above them. If you have the Holy Spirit, "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John. 4: 4. It is of Himself, that Spirit, the power for life. He is superior to the elements and Peter knew this and he said, "Command me to come to thee"; and I too can be superior to the elements. And, indeed, he could be; and, indeed, he was. And you too can be superior to the elements, the circumstances in which you are. In Christ you can be. Paul, you remember says, "If God be for us, who against us?" Rom 8: 31. No powers, no authority, not even life or death holds any threat to me because God is for me, for me in Jesus.

And so here we are. Peter steps, gingerly perhaps, out of the boat and he walks to Jesus on the water, superior to the circumstances. You may say, Well, it was all right to begin with. I was superior to the grief of my bereavement. I was superior to the problems at work. I was superior to being out of a job. I was superior to my friends taunting me about my new-found and newly-declared Christianity. And then suddenly I was aware of the difficulties. Is it a different Saviour? Is it a different Person we call to? No, it is the same Jesus. "Lord, save me". Have you ever cried

that: "Lord, save me"? "And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand", and he was safe. What power there is in that outstretched hand of Jesus, and it is outstretched today in the gospel. The day of grace is with us, the hand of Jesus is outstretched. Close your grip on it! Cry to Him and you will find that He is on your side; He is there for you. You remember Paul in his agony in Romans 7, the converted Pharisee. He was trying to reconcile the law with grace and he knew what he wanted to be, knew he had a new identity in Christ. He knew that his sins were forgiven. He knew he was going to glory. And still he wanted to do all these awful things he thought he had finished with, and he was in the same condition of flesh and blood. And he says, "who shall deliver me out of this body of death?" v 24. Like Samson he had identified the pillar of lust in himself. I think he had already had to do with the pillar of pride on the Damascus road. But he says the law came along and it slew me. It was not that I had done anything wrong, but I had these wicked thoughts in my heart and, he says, I cried out who is going to deliver me from this body of sin? He says, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord". Jesus, the anointed Lord, was there for him in his anguish. Sometimes we have to go these roads. Sometimes we have to feel the storm but it is the same Jesus. Do not doubt Him. Jesus says, Why did you doubt? I was there for you all the time. Do not look at the trouble! Look at Me! Dear friend, if you have never done it before, do it now! Look to Jesus! If you are still in your sins, look to Him and accept Him as your own Lord! If you are in difficulty in your life, look to Him as your own Lord! Do not doubt Him! Ask for more faith! There as a man to whom Jesus said, Do you believe? He said, "I believe, help mine unbelief", Mark 9: 24. He was realistic. He knew and he admitted that there was unbelief in his heart. He says, "Help mine unbelief".

May the Lord help us! Wherever you are in your soul history, there is more to go, but the Lord is on *your* side, He is there for you. Indeed, He says, "I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age", Matt 28: 20. When will the age be complete? Well, we read about the destruction of Babylon. That will be the beginning of

the end, the end of this present age. Be clear in your mind about what marks the world's system! Be clear in your mind about the darkness, the oppressive moral darkness out there! You may not see it, but you need to trust those who can; you need to trust the word of scripture; and in one hour it will be finished. But, dear friends, over against that, in three hours the question of your sinful history was finished before God if only you will accept the Saviour. May it be so for His Name's sake.

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