

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

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THE DEATH OF THE LORD AS BEARING ON CHURCH BREAKDOWN

Jim Gray

Hebrews 13: 10-15

I have been thinking of the death of the Lord Jesus. Sin cannot be bypassed by God: sin had to be judged and condemned and sins had to be atoned for. That comes into the death of the Lord. It is a very wide matter. What was on my heart was the bearing of the death of the Lord on the ground of our gathering. The offerings that come in here are the sin offerings, "for of those beasts whose blood is carried as sacrifices for sin", but it is not to do with individual sins.

If you look at Leviticus 4 you will find it is to do with the breakdown of communion in the whole camp. That is a serious matter. What I was thinking was that the Lord Jesus took account of the failure of Israel in the camp and that is a word of appeal to Jews who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah and accepted Him as their Saviour to leave Judaism in Jerusalem and go without the camp. It would be a very sore matter for a true Jew to leave the camp. We are speaking in regard to history. They would do it with sorrow in their heart, going out to Christ, crucified outside the gate. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, felt the breakdown of the people, he himself in the midst of it. So the Jew at this time, the appeal being made to him before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, would feel it, leaving Jerusalem, leaving the camp, leaving Judaism, to go to Christ. They would gladly go to Christ, but the setting of the opprobrium of the whole thing would be on their spirits.

Now, we come to the present time and we would all understand, the younger ones too, that the camp for us is Christendom. What was set up in its beauty by God, the house of God established on the earth in Acts 2 In the power of the Spirit, and all the demonstration of power that was there when they "began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave to them to speak forth", v 4, what glory there was in it for God, yet breakdown came in. I think

the Lord Jesus in His death took account of the breakdown. It is a sober matter to consider, but it is a wholesome matter. Let it sink into our hearts, that the ground on which we gather is righteous ground. It is ground for every Christian, but it is ground prepared by Christ through His death. I think the Lord of glory who died on the cross and bore the judgment of sin and the substitutionary work for sins, took account of the breakdown, the ecclesiastical breakdown. I think it entered into His work of atonement. I suggest that for consideration.

It seems to me that the bearing of this scripture, with the "sacrifices for sin" being referred to, through which He atoned for our sins, has also in view the establishment of ground where communion can be restored as a whole. Leviticus 4 brings out that communion was broken: it was not broken just for individuals. The blood was carried into the holiest and sprinkled before the veil and also anointed on the altar of incense, in view of the establishment of communion for the people. It relates, as far as I can see, to the collective setting of things, and confirms the righteousness of a collective setting as established in the death of Christ. The Lord's death has established that, collective moral ground: "therefore let us go forth to him". You count on others being exercised. We have found one another on this ground, dear brethren, but the ground was not prepared by us: it was prepared by Christ in His death, through the sacrifice for sin that is typified in the offerings, and here in this place the blood is carried into the holies and the bodies burned outside the camp, two sober matters as to the death of Christ. As looking down the dispensation, I think the Lord encompassed it all.

That is how it has come home to me in recent times that the Lord has encompassed the whole matter of the failure, so that there is always room for recovery, because the ground remains. It does not change. We may fall away from the truth and depart from it, consider the whole breakdown of what we may call the brethren movement, and the disunity that has come in and the diversity and groups. We carry with us the opprobrium of all that in our hearts, as we "go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach". Love

towards all the saints remains in our hearts. How you feel for the saints who are caught up in systems of men, not knowing where to go, caught up in the turmoil of the breakdown, yet, thank God, to get our eye on Christ because the ground of gathering remains. "Go forth to him without the camp" always remains because it is established in His death, and as we come to a judgment of our departures - and we have known our departures - in the presence of God, we can go forth to Him because He already has made atonement.

That is the glory of the death of Christ, dear brethren, that He has already made atonement. It was not an after-thought. The work of Christ encompassed everything in relation to the dispensation, to see the saints through, morally, on righteous grounds. We would not be boastful or precocious but humble Christian people as taking this moral ground. We take it in relation to the light we have. It is a question of being morally in keeping with the ground the Lord has established in His death and, in this scripture, communion is based on the sin-offering, so that praise to God, as it says, "sacrifice of praise", is meant to continue. I think it is a collective setting: "therefore let us go forth" involves that there would be others exercised, exercised as individuals, but, as going forth as individuals, we find one another in relation to outside the camp, as feeling the awfulness of what God's name is attached to in the camp, ecclesiastically. How the Lord felt ecclesiastical sin! How we should feel ecclesiastical sin! Moral sin and immorality is one thing in the eyes of God and by nature it shocks us more than ecclesiastical sin, but ecclesiastical sin may be greater in the eyes of God if we can speak of comparisons, but the Lord Jesus faced the matter of ecclesiastical failure in His atoning work.

I put this forth suggestively because it seems to me that it is a very important matter as bearing on the righteousness and legality of the ground, not our ground, but the moral ground that is there, and it is the responsibility of every Christian to take that ground. It is not optional; it is obligatory. "Therefore let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach" is obligatory; obligatory on every

Christian to take that ground. And that ground always remains and it is righteous because of its righteous and moral basis. So our exercise is to be in accord with that, to delight to be in accord with that, so that we fulfil assembly obligations in regard to assembly life. Morally I should be in accord with it, in my public life amongst the brethren, my practical life in my household, my life in my private setting, my prayers, my devotions. I am using the singular to bring out the fact that it is on each one of us. It is not an official position at all; it is a moral position, but it must be filled out in every circle in which I walk and move. Each circle must be in accord with the death of the Lord so that the Lord then can acknowledge it. There is no public indication. There is no distinguishing one company from another publicly, but secretly the believer would know something, as gathered to the Lord's name outside the camp with others, of the blessedness of His presence. You cannot assume it. It is not because I belong to a company that I know it, but as taking this ground and being morally in accord with it so that every part of my walk is affected by it. We have not exactly to be apologetic to anyone about the collective setting of things or of maintaining it because we did not establish the ground: Christ established it in His death.

May the Lord help us in these things in relation to our present testimony, for His Name's sake.

EDINBURGH

18 April 1995

ATTACHMENT TO CHRIST

Eddie Johnston

Ruth 1: 6-11 ("me?"), 14 -19 ("Bethlehem")

I have a simple thought as to the reality of what is in each one of us. I think it involves affection for Jesus. Our brother has been speaking about what is substantially set up at the present time in the midst of the confusion and breakdown in Christendom. It is a tremendous thing to me that God is operating where there has been confusion.

We are familiar with the end of Judges: "every man did what was right in his own eyes". That is the present condition of things. It is then a question of coming into subjection to the will of God, and God has provided for us. It is a wonderful thing - He will provide (see Gen 22: 14) - no one can hinder Him in what He is doing and He is doing things for His own pleasure. I encourage the young people with this in what our brother read, if there will be the sacrifice of praise on our lips related to the divine pleasure. These things should be substantial with us. Affection for Jesus is one object of God's whole working out of His counsel and purpose. Young people - initially, we are all young people - it is wonderful to get a sense of Jesus in your soul, as Saviour. He was there day by day. The awful character of what is Pharisaical was in opposition. Our brother has been speaking about the ecclesiastical sin, and the opposition to Jesus was greatest from the Pharisaical character. They had their own ways, their own ideas, they had drifted, departed from the truth of God but Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", John 14: 6.

You young people can know Him as your Saviour, feel that you are pleasing Him every day, in your prayers, your intimacy with Him and your knowledge of Him. He will listen to you! He is in glory now. Jesus was the true ark of the testimony, the ark went all the way, the centre for the earthly people, through the Israelites' movements and journeys related to the will of God. It set forward the way for them to

go. That is why it was called the ark of the testimony. Jesus sets forward the way we should go.

We are all just simple people but in the midst of such a world of corruption ecclesiastically we need to get the truth into our souls vitally. I say to my younger brethren, take heed where you are now and the atmosphere, the purity and love and holiness, all that Jesus stood for. The world is not safe, but this is a safe area. I remember a brother saying, I want to die in the testimony. I thought that was a strange thing because I thought, Well, a Christian is a Christian.

Nobody can take that away from you, your eternal salvation. But what he meant was to be in the testimony related to what our brother has been saying, going "forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach". We claim nothing but thank God - how wonderful it is! - that He has directed our footsteps to where the truth is spoken and upheld; to lead us to understand what relates to Christ and the assembly. It is a wonderful thing to understand what is for the divine pleasure, what is for the heart of Christ.

Here I am thinking about the sorrowful, sad condition of things that existed - Naomi, sad, sorrowful woman, a widow. It is the character when Christ is, absent. And here was a feeling woman.

We need to have depth of feeling. I would like to convey to you something to resuscitate, something to maintain our affections. You might wonder if you went round numerically those available to you and those whom the Lord has taken, how the testimony can go through: but it will be in souls, in hearts. Jesus glorified is the testimony that God will have at the latter end all that He has designed in counsel and purpose. Naomi gives the opportunity to her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, but it says, "And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave to her". Ruth's affections were moved in relation to her, "Ruth clave to her". Do you cleave to Jesus? He is a Man who sympathetically understands. He has been here, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief". I love that! "His visage was so marred more than any man": He is supreme in suffering, supreme in glory. He says "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?" Luke 24: 26. It is a

wonderful thing to appreciate by faith, that Jesus is in the glory. These are realities to lay hold of.

It comes down to us, each one individually, "And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave to her". As an individual she clave to her. She was related to the testimony in Naomi: There was something in that woman that foreshadows the feelings of Jesus at the departure of everything that was around. Then it says, "And when she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking to her. And they two went until they came to Bethlehem". The testimony was in weakness, feebleness, but she was going to meet the mighty man of wealth. He was the central object in this whole book, but all I wanted to call attention to was one who was "stedfastly minded to go with her". And just this point. "Call me not Naomi - call me Mara" meaning bitterness. Her spirit now in complete submission to the will of God.

Well, to encourage one another there is no-one else but Jesus. The ark of the testimony goes forward, right through the wilderness, all the way. It is not called the ark of the testimony beyond the Jordan, but all the way through the wilderness and we are in the wilderness at the present time. May the Lord bless the word for His Name's sake!

EDINBURGH

18 April 1995

AT A BURIAL

(i) David Pye

John 13: 23; 1 Corinthians 15: 20-22

An occasion such as this is in the ways of the Lord to search us and to comfort our hearts and to test us a little as to our lives and how we are living. It is a very fine thing to be conscious of the love of Jesus: its warmth in the heart and soul is very precious. If you put your faith and trust in that glorious One, He never forgets you. We might through waywardness lose the enjoyment of our link with Him, but He never forgets the reality of the trust that we have placed in Him.

Our brother has in his life displayed the features of one who had a great love for the Lord Jesus. We can say that earnestly.

There is a woman spoken of by the Lord Himself and He says specifically about her - you find it in Luke's gospel chapter 7: 14 - that "... she loved much", and I think we could say that of our brother: he did love much. It marked him.

In this section in John's gospel there is a disciple, John, the apostle, who had a very close place in the Lord's affections. How blessed was the portion of John! He was at table here; the other disciples were there too, but he is the one who was in the bosom of Jesus, and it specifically says, "whom Jesus loved". That is a blessed thing to have, the joy of that inward knowledge. You form a link in faith with Jesus and it remains for ever. But we would be searched as to ourselves as to whether we have that link with the Saviour. It is available towards all but it requires that act of faith on our part to lay hold of it aware that it remains for ever. Our brother was in the enjoyment of that link in faith. He knew the Saviour, and his trust was in Him. How often he spoke of the Lord's sacrificial service. His earnest desire was towards others that they should come to know this blessed One and know the blessing of divine love that is towards them. He was in this room just a week past last night and free amongst us in happy enjoyment. He spoke much as to purification and how necessary that is in view of maintaining links in

love with the Lord Jesus Himself. How wonderful it is that now he is in the rest of the Saviour's love. What a blessed portion; it was one to which he looked forward anticipatively. There is a sense of comfort for our hearts in this: here is one that loved the Lord and one now that is at rest in His love. The matter that remains is as to whether what we have seen in our brother might have some effect upon us, because we will miss him. He was always present at the occasions of assembling. He rejoiced in being together with God's people, and he was always earnest in his love for the Lord Jesus and for the people of God and the things of God. But he has gone and the challenge remains whether there are those ready to come in and take up these interests and be found in them.

I read in 1 Corinthians 15, a very encouraging Scripture because it speaks of death but it also speaks of the power of the life of One who has gone through death and broken its power, the glory and the triumph of what the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought. And it says here where we read that "... Christ is raised from among the dead, firstfruits of those fallen asleep". Our brother has fallen asleep in Jesus. He awaits that day when the Lord will come again and He will be raised, not in a feeble body, but with a body of glory. And death has come in "by man"; but it tells us, "by man also resurrection of those that are dead". But in what a Man is the resurrection, the Man Christ Jesus, that One, so wondrous to the hearts of those who love Him. The One who is coming again to take us from this scene, whether we fall asleep in Jesus or whether we remain until He come!

I read the section because it says, "For as in the Adam all die..." - it lies upon all men - but it goes on to say, "thus also in the Christ all shall be made alive". Our brother knew the joy of what it was to be in Christ and, in that blessed portion, there is what never dies. It goes through to shine eternally so there is in the vessel that which actually never dies. We know what relates to the natural side, but there is a spiritual side which is in Christ, and it shall be made alive. That power wrought in the glory of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ is there, a living evidence and witness to a power superior to death. Oh, how wonderful it is to love the Saviour! It says as to

Solomon that God gave him a large heart and you might well say that these things are given of God in the special link that we have in communion with Him. Peter speaks too about the need to be tender-hearted. I feel that these features need to be borne in upon us.

They present just the attractiveness of how love operates both in a person and amongst those who love the Lord - 1 Peter 3: 8: "Finally, be all of one mind, sympathising, full of brotherly love, tender hearted, humble minded". I think you could say that these features were found in our brother: they are very necessary features and show indeed that you have formed a bond with Christ.

Well, may our hearts be comforted by these things!

(ii) Robert Taylor

2 Timothy 4: 6-8

One thing that marked our brother was that he finished well. May that be a comfort to our hearts! I believe it would be normal for a Christian, to finish well. God said to Israel that He had fed them with manna and led them through the wilderness that they might have a humble mind, to do them good at their latter end (Deut 8: 16). Of some of us it might have to be said, "Ye ran well; who has stopped you...?", Gal 5: 7. But scripture is full of persons who finished well through divine grace. Jacob's closing days were his best. Of Joseph it says, "when dying ... gave commandment concerning his bones", Heb 11: 22. Great men whose closing days were very precious to heaven! That was peculiarly true of our Lord, perfect in every circumstance and every day, indeed, but at the close of His days, how precious to heaven that in the presence of adversity the will of God was His paramount object - pleasing His Father to finish in a note of triumph. What victory has ensued from those closing moments of our Lord, the pressure that was there bringing out the substantiality of who was there, pressures unparalleled, betrayed, denied, even forsaken, and yet in those closing days, the present dispensation a tribute to it all! Paul would bring this forward here that we may look to how we finish. It is peculiar to this dispensation that things are going to finish well. In Israel things broke down, but this dispensation will finish in glory, not any tribute to men, but a tribute to the Holy Spirit of God that this long dispensation will end in glory.

Paul here is speaking of his finish. He is already being poured out. Prison had not hardened his spirit. The pressures of all that was rolled in upon him had not hardened his spirit. He was looking for the time of his release from these things, but in the midst of the pressure, he was finishing well, finishing in confidence in his Lord, finishing in the spirit that marked his Lord in spite of the pressure.

So he writes here that he had "finished the race". Our brother has finished his race: he is now with Christ, but what he has left in

those closing years is not only a comfort to us but an encouragement to us that we may finish well. We do not know when the finish may be. For him it came very quickly, but may it exercise our hearts that the Spirit would give grace that we may finish well.

He says, "I have kept the faith". That had not been easy. Many pressures there have been in the history of the saints, but there is power and there is grace that we may finish, God's work in us completed. In earlier years it may be other things command our attention, but I believe particularly the start and the finish of a believer's course are peculiarly pleasurable to heaven. It says, "I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth...", Jer 2: 2, and here we have the finish, but what about in between? It brings out many features sometimes, but I believe that God in His ways would work with us that there may be an end to the ambitious and commercial spirit, the self-pleasing spirit, that there may be in His grace an end to these things, and to the bitterness and emulation that may arise in the human heart, that there may be something formed that can be ready, we may say, for translation. Paul calls attention here that in that race he had his eye on the goal. I believe that is of all importance if we are to finish well that our eye is on the goal. Not on things here, we can never finish well if things here are our object, but Paul said he was looking for His appearing, not only the rapture, blessed as that will be, but if we are to finish well and if we are to finish the race, our eye is to be on the goal and that is that Christ and Christ alone is to be magnified in His glory. Paul was looking on, not only for that chain to be taken away or even to be with Christ, blessed as that would be, but he was looking for the day when his Master, the King of kings, would come to be displayed in His glory.

Our brother had that in his heart too and may it be increasingly in our hearts, looking not for anything here that would justify us or please us, but our eye on the goal that Christ in the day of His appearing will come to be glorified. He whose right it is will come to reign and there will be seen the once despised Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords, worthy by all to be adored. May our hearts

and our eyes be kept on the goal that we in grace and the Spirit's strength may finish to the praise and glory of God's Name!

(iii) Robert Renton

1 Corinthians 4: 15; Psalm 90: 12

Our brother in his opening prayer referred to fatherhood, a very necessary yet scarce commodity. The apostle says where we have read, "For if ye should have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers". I always looked on our beloved brother as a father in Kirkcaldy. Now, the question is, who will fill the ranks? It is a very necessary feature in every locality - fatherhood. John says in his epistle, "I write to you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning". I would say that that would be true of our brother. May we be exercised to exhibit this feature, so necessary, kindness, affection. I was privileged to be with him on Saturday night. He had not been feeling well during the day but he came along to a brother's house and I was privileged to be with him. He was bright, and happy, and in a few hours he was with the Lord.

"So teach us to number our days": dear friends, if any are unconverted here, I would appeal to you. Life is so short; things are so uncertain: what really matters is a link with Jesus and to be assured that that is your portion! And for the rest of us who are left, let us number our days, beloved brethren. Some of us at best cannot have long to go, but may we see to it that each day is dedicated and devoted for the pleasure of God. What greater could there be? Our brother will be missed. I shall miss him. But soon and very soon we will all be with the Lord Jesus. He has just gone a little while before. May our hearts be comforted and, as the Psalm says, "So teach us" - we need to be taught - "to number our days, that we may acquire a wise heart". May the Lord bless the word for His Name's sake!

KIRKCALDY

20 April 1995

(Burial of John Wilson)

THE HOMEWARD JOURNEY

From the French

Though 'tis a desert dreary
Through which my footsteps haste,
E'en though 'tis sad and weary,
Yet Christ has trod the waste.
It leads me to the Father;
And, as I pass along,
None other but my Saviour
Can fill my soul with song.

On Him I am reclining,
I follow not in vain!
And loss brings no repining,
Since Christ Himself I gain.
Earth's lesser joys soon ending,
My steps would only stay;
But on His power depending,
From these I turn away.

His love my fetters breaking,
I press towards the goal;
Eternal songs are waking
Already in my soul.
And as the road grows rougher,
Faith only looks above;
The trials that I suffer,
But teach me, "God is love".

And though while here abiding,
My spirit oft may groan,
Yet in His presence hiding,
I cannot be alone.
His grace for all availing,
Attends me night and day;
His rod and staff unfailing,
My comfort and my stay.

Oh, grace beyond expression,
To know Him here below!

Such is their blest possession,
Who in His footsteps go.
And soon in brightest glory,
Lord, I shall see Thy face,
And sing the matchless story
Of victory through Thy grace!

Translated A.S.A., Jun.

Reprinted from The Christian Friend 1878

This translation is in some respects closer to the French original than is Hymn 228. In the French hymn book the author is "Inconnu" (unknown): Mr Champney attributed it to Mr Darby.