

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 305

August 1998

Contents

"A GARDEN ENCLOSED"

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

"A GARDEN ENCLOSED"

Psalm 22: 21-23; 45: 1-7; Song of Songs 4: 12-16; 5: 1; 6: 2,3, 22; John 12: 1-3

J.A.B. We had a sense in the service following the Lord's Supper this morning of the things into which the Lord Jesus enters with pleasure. The thought of the garden was referred to in one of the thanksgivings. The scripture I have mainly in mind is the one in the Song. It speaks of the "garden enclosed" and the "spring shut up, a fountain sealed" - what is exclusively for the pleasure of the Lord Jesus. John 12 would seem to give us a New Testament example of that, but I thought of how all that is secured for the pleasure of Christ is a result of His sufferings, and that is why I began in Psalm 22. In the earlier part of the Psalm, it speaks as no other Old Testament scripture does of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, but then there is this response, "Yea, from the horns of the buffaloes hast thou answered me ... in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee". We sometimes think of the garden and what the Lord Jesus enters into as that where He can find His people, but I think that the setting in chapter 4 of the Song is that the spouse is the garden: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, and so here "in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee". I thought of that as answering to the idea of the garden. In other words, where the Lord Jesus can be among people, among his brethren, "in the midst of the congregation", is where He finds His delight and that is where He praises God. So the praise of God proceeds from that: "glorify him; and revere him, all ye the seed of Israel".

That is a collective setting, but in Psalm 45 we have the answer to it individually, "My heart is welling forth with a good matter". That answers to the thought of the fountain and the spring in the Song of Songs. And then the Psalmist goes on, "And in thy splendour ride prosperously". These are wonderful things and I believe that we touched them this morning. No doubt you did too where you were breaking bread, and I wondered if we could speak of it together. I trust that the familiarity of these scriptures may not blunt their

freshness and their appeal to our affections and that, as we speak of these things together, it will not merely be the going over of well-known ground: rather that we might get a fresh impression of the intense delight and pleasure that the Lord Jesus has in those who are His own, in this that He has which is spoken of in the Song as a "garden enclosed", something which is exclusively for His delight and for no-one else.

M.G.W. There is the extreme pressure in Psalm 22, which affects the hearts of the saints and causes a desire to provide a place where the Lord Jesus can be entirely without pressure, and, not only that, where He can come with pleasure, where He is free to come. Do you have in mind that He can gather it: He can take just what He wants? It is all available to Him. It is not so much the side of us offering Him something, but it is all available, and He can come and just take what He wants for His own pleasure.

J.A.B. That is very good and very much in line with the few thoughts I had about it. I would be glad of the brethren's help in opening up what flows out of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. We think of Him being in Bethany; it was only six days before the Passover. He was anticipating all that He was about to pass through. Then after the Lord Jesus rose, He could come to His own and say, "Peace be to you", John 20: 19. But here it seems to me there is a very direct reference to what flows for divine Persons as a direct and immediate result of the sufferings of Christ. These verses up to verse 20 are very profound, and very direct in their application to what the Lord Jesus bore on the cross, but then from that position of suffering - "from the horns of the buffaloes hast thou answered me" - we have immediately, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren". Could you help in this?

J.N.M. Well, when we speak of the sufferings of our Lord, we quite properly think of what He suffered for us, but I wondered rather if the contemplation of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus might bring to our heart how much the Father meant to Him. "In the midst"; we use that expression a lot. But, according to this, He comes "in the midst" to praise the Father there, to use the assembly for the Father's

praise. How much the Father meant to Him! So from that we would understand the Father a little more, the One who was the all-absorbing object to such a One as Jesus?

J.A.B. That is very helpful. I am glad you bring that side of it in. We are sometimes reminded that the Lord Jesus was never more pleasurable to the Father than when He hung on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin - "who by the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God", Heb 9: 14. Is that the side of things that you have in mind? I would like you to say a little more.

J.N.M. It is the burnt-offering that lays hold of me because, naturally speaking, I am always concerned with my part. But I think the Lord has helped me to see that there is another part which is infinitely greater. As you read the gospels, you appreciate in some measure at least what the Father meant to Jesus. But when we come to the cross, a new door is opened and as we contemplate the sufferings, we would say, I never knew how much the Father meant to Him until this moment. What a Person the Father must be, because what a Person Jesus is, and yet He is entirely absorbed with the Father and, from this point of view at any rate, the sole purpose of the assembly is for the praise of Father, the One whom He loves so much.

J.A.B. That is fine. The assembly as a vessel for God's praise is a very fine thought. What you are bringing in as to our contemplating the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, and what He was to the Father, would, I think, help to yield the fragrance that these other scriptures speak of. As has been said, it is not a question of struggling to produce something, but rather that the fragrance is there, and it is there by virtue of the way Jesus has gone and the effect that that has had on our affections.

J.N.M. I thought of what the old brethren used to say - and I think we should say it more often - that on Lord's Day morning it is not a time for meditation, it is a time for contemplation. That puts the whole thing in a nutshell.

M.G.W. So the Psalm begins with One who is forsaken, and yet is it not precious that His desire is that the assembly be available for the

satisfaction of the Father? Of course the garden yields for His own pleasure, but is it precious to think that His first thought is what would be for the pleasure of the Father? Is that what is in your mind?

J.A.B. That bears on my impression as to this, "in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee". The Lord Jesus has this vessel which is supremely fitted for the praise of God, and it is fitted because in it there is an answer to Christ's sufferings.

J.C.G. There are two things that come out in this Psalm which caused the Father to love Jesus. One was that He did this work alone and the second was that He went to the furthest possible point. "The horns of the buffaloes" indicates that, does it not? He went to the most extreme place in relation to the will of the Father. Does that bring out further the lustre of His place in the midst of the congregation? The idea of the congregation would bring us in: it is an assembly of persons.

J.A.B. Well, we have spoken of the Father's appreciation of the Lord Jesus as He suffered there, but as taking our place among those who are spoken of in verse 22 - "my brethren, in the midst of the congregation" - it must be that we are affected by the distance, the extremity to which the Lord Jesus went. And yet I was affected during the week in thinking of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus that He was not overwhelmed by them. He bore them and carried them, but He was not overwhelmed. Do you think that as we contemplate these things, there would be an answer in our hearts? That is my exercise. We speak of these things together and no doubt they do affect us, but this is to be a vessel of praise. And we do know something about that - I believe we did this morning. You referred to the garden and it was that which set my thoughts on this line, that there is that which is for the Lord Jesus' heart. But we have to begin here with what there is for the Father as a result of His sufferings and the way that He went.

H.T. I was wondering if in the thought of His sufferings and the outcome, there is the thought of refinement and quality. One speaks

guardedly because there is nothing short of perfection with the Lord, but lustre has been referred to and I think that has to do with quality.

J.A.B. Well, the Song of Songs deals with that to a very great extent, what is particularly lustrous and embellished for the heart of the Lord Jesus in all its richness and refinement. We sometimes are dragged down a little by ordinary things, are we not? But do you think we have to see that the things which we are speaking of now are very special? There is a refinement about them that you do not get anywhere else.

H.T. Exactly. It belongs to that which is connected with God's sovereign operations in us, which is really outwith the realm of responsibility. It links with that. You spoke this morning about a scene where sin can never come and I think this is just what it should be.

J.A.B. I think it is a very fine thing to get through to that. We are so used to our own weakness and failure and the effects of that, but we need to see that the Lord would have us with Him in an area of things which had never been affected by sin and could not be affected by sin. That has been established as a result of what He did on the cross. It seems to me that this is the basis for what you spoke of as the garden. It has been established as a result of these sufferings.

J.N.M. I would just mention a hymn in that connection:

The lustre of His love, in death
Shone forth in glory rare (Hymn 374)

J.C.G. The thought of brethren is not only that the Lord comes into the midst of a company, but it is an elevated and distinctive company, is it? The garden is separate. The old houses often had extensive estates but they always had a walled garden in which something special was displayed or cultivated. This is what you are bringing out as to what is for the Lord, but it is elevated, is it?

J.A.B. Yes, it is. In one sense the Song does not quite rise to the type because it speaks of going down into the garden of nuts (chap

6: 11), but I had that sense this morning that this is an elevated position. As has been said, there is a spiritual refinement, something that is above everything else, is it not? I am glad of what you say as to the brethren. These are relationships which have been established in the death of the Lord Jesus and they all underlie this thought of the garden, what is for His heart exclusively.

M.G.W. I notice that in verse 12 it is "a garden", but in verse 16 she says, "Blow upon my garden ... and then "Let my beloved come into His garden". And that is the reference that He takes up; he says, "I am come into my garden". What do you say about that?

J.A.B. I could not say much but I have the impression that as the Lord comes in, He comes into what is exclusively for Him, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse". Perhaps the reference in chapter 6 is a wider thought, His going down into the garden "To see the verdure of the valley, To see whether the vine budded". Something more extensive may be indicated there, but in chapter 4 it is "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse"; it is what He has which He enjoys as exclusively for Him. Then He refers to "A spring shut up, a fountain sealed" and that is what He refers to as His garden, is it not?

M.G.W. That is very helpful. Do you think that as she has the light of that, she knows that is how He regards her? Therefore, she wants to see how this is kept. Indeed, she can invite the north wind, things may get severe, or the south wind, pleasant and blessed as it is, but whatever comes along, there is a result that is for His pleasure.

J.A.B. So you have all these aspects, all these different fruits and spices which are contained within the garden. I link that a little with Psalm 45 because each impression of Christ adds to the lustre, adds to the refinement. There is this answer to Him in fragrance, and it is a blending together of individual impressions of Christ. It is a collective response, but it is the aggregate of what is welling forth and we have that in Psalm 45. I was linking what wells forth from

the heart with these fountains and springs in the garden. Do you think that would be right?

H.T. That is very good and it becomes a concentrated matter as with Mary in John 12. The spices growing in the garden would be a concentrated idea, I think. It is not acres of crops; it is on a much smaller scale, but the quality is there, the lustre is there and the fragrance of the spices is known.

J.A.B. I wondered that. The reference in chapter 6 is wider - "the garden of nuts" and "the verdure of the valley, to see whether the vine budded, whether pomegranates blossomed". That seemed to me to be more extensive but there is something in chapter 4 which, while perhaps enclosed in its extent, is specially for the heart of Christ. Do you think that would answer to what you have just said?

It is not exactly a public thing, nor is it extensive but there is a concentration there of what is precious to Him.

H.T. So it leads me to appreciate what there is in a local assembly for Christ. We may say it is not very extensive, even numerically, but it is what is concentrated there for Him.

J.A.B. Well, there were three persons at Bethany, were there not? Yet, what satisfaction the Lord had as going there and as the odour filled that area. There were Mary and Martha and Lazarus, but what the Lord Jesus had in answer to His heart there! I wondered if the garden would be like that.

G.B.G. Do you think that what is constitutional is known there in the garden? These relationships, brethren of Christ and bride of Christ, are constitutional relationships. Being kindred with Christ, as you are saying, would be as a result of His death. Then we also have His Spirit. That constitutes us brethren of Christ, so that we think the same way as He thinks and He can touch us and we would be there just as He wants it.

J.A.B. That is very helpful in relation to what I was feeling after. So what is constitutionally of Him is typified by the rib taken out of the side of Adam, is it not? "My beloved is gone down into his garden ... To feed in the gardens and to gather lilies". And then, "He feedeth

his flock among the lilies". It seems to be a reference to the way in which her beloved feeds there. He has gone down "to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies" and he feeds His flock there, so that in its application to us, we can be constitutionally like Christ.

J.N.M. There is a reference in chapter 1 to feeding, "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' booths". There is a place where He will be found and that is the place to feed.

J.A.B. There is a question there: "Tell me, thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest thy flock, where thou makest it to rest at noon...?" It has been said that the answer to that question comes in here in chapter 6.

J.N.M. The first chapter is something of the intention, and it is maybe a little while before we come to the result of the intention, but it is there.

J.A.B. I would be glad if you would say a little more about what you have brought in about our being of Christ constitutionally, so that it can be said, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse". It is not so much that she is in that area, but she is the thing itself, what He takes such delight in. Is that what you had in mind?

G.B.G. Yes, "my brethren, in the midst of the congregation". It has often been said that the Lord would use His brethren in response to the Father and the response should be exactly as if it were from Him. Is that right?

J.M.M. In connection with that, this verse in which He refers to her as "my sister, my spouse" would include what is constitutional. The spouse is really the crucial thing in the Song of Songs, but here he adds, "my sister". Does that give the link?

J.A.B. The thought of relationship, you mean? That is fine. I am glad of what is coming in. It is as the brethren bring in their contributions that these things flow.

J.C.G. So the Lord would enjoy family feelings and although the family may underlie what we enjoy at the Supper, He enjoys the

family feelings that come to light, do you think? The garden would express that. That is why it says, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse".

J.A.B. Well, there is what is very precious and exclusive for Him. Do you think we need to understand the right use of the word "exclusive"? It means what is only for Him, and that things that are not for Him are excluded where He is supreme and where sin has never come. We have come through a phase in our history where the word "exclusive" had negative connotations, but it is right to think of the word in this way, that what is precious and exclusively for the heart of Christ is guarded so that He can find His pleasure there. Is that right?

H.T. I have no difficulty at all about the word "exclusive". We have scriptural warrant for excluding everything that is not suitable to God's presence.

J.A.B. That is helpful. So here we have all these different impressions of Christ. Each one would be like the tongue being "the pen of a ready writer" and saying "what I have composed touching the king".

J.N.M. These things are specific. You are speaking of the side of what flows naturally, and in Psalm 45 the writer can say something definite: "thou art fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever". That is no generality. That is something he had for himself, we would say, by the Spirit. So these clumps of plants, as has been said, are not in a field. Here and there would be pomegranates or spikenard or saffron or calamus, each one sending forth its fragrance, each one very different from all the others, but each distinctive and special. That is really what our part, our contribution should be, by the Spirit.

J.A.B. So we should all have something to say about the Lord Jesus, and it need not be anything that is overly formed: "thy shoots" - it may just be the beginning of any impression as it forms in the heart. It may not be developed very much, but what intense delight

the Lord Jesus has in it as it is expressed, even in the quietness of your own heart.

M.G.W. Should we be able to speak of "what I have composed"? I often quote expressions which have helped me, which are other people's compositions, but the psalmist is speaking of 'my occupation,' "what I have composed". He has been feeding and this is the result of it. But I appreciate what you say: it does not have to be elaborate; it just has to be to the point and from the heart.

J.A.B. So there was something which had been fully formed in affection for Christ in John 12. Mary had that ointment which she had accumulated and she pours it out. That would perhaps refer to what is more fully formed, but the Lord values these shoots here, "Thy shoots are a paradise of pomegranates". He sees what is there potentially, does He not? The shoots may be there but to Him they are "a paradise of pomegranates, with precious fruits". He sees what is potentially for His heart's pleasure and He values it very much, does He not?

J.N.M. So these plants are all set wisely and with the skill of the gardener. When the Lord comes in at the Supper and is among us, does He not look round on the Spirit's work and enjoy what is in each one?

J.A.B. As that happens, do you think, this oil of gladness that Psalm 45 speaks of flows? The garden hardly speaks of anointing or oil, but it is the same sort of thought: "Thou has loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy companions". You get the impression of the companions being gathered round and yielding Him their praise as God anoints Him in this way.

J.N.M. They are affected, are they not? I was thinking even as we came together, we are affected by the environment we go into. We will be affected when we go to heaven. But you could not say that of the Lord. He affects the environment He goes into. Is that not right?

J.A.B. You might say He is it.

J.N.M. We had something of that this morning; He fills heaven. It is not that heaven has affected and influenced Him by His going there. He has filled heaven, and He fills us as He comes in among us.

A.P.G. I was thinking about verse 15 in chapter 4, "A fountain in the gardens, a well of living waters". Would that suggest the freshness of the Spirit in this contribution for the Lord's pleasure?

J.A.B. Yes, it is what is maintained in freshness by the living power, the living flow of the Spirit. It is what we had yesterday, "It is the Spirit which quickens", John 6: 63. So this living response in growth and formation for the heart of Jesus will never be known unless there is something of the flow of the Holy Spirit. Say a little more.

A.P.G. I wondered if you had any thought as to the fountain and the well. They are different thoughts. There is the spring and the fountain. There may be depths in the well.

J.A.B. The heart welling forth in Psalm 45 seems to be like the spring and the fountain, something that bubbles up; it may just be a little water but it is fresh. But the well speaks of the depth of divine resource, and what resource we have in the Holy Spirit! We could never plumb these depths; it is an inexhaustible resource of freshness and vitality.

H.T. The resource that you are drawing attention to means that there is always abundance there. What is coming out is that you do not need bulk in these things: a very little goes a long way. Mary had a pound of this ointment which she used to good effect. I was thinking that doxologies in scripture are quite short and vital, but in the composer's soul, they began somewhere with an impression of Christ and the love of Christ.

J.A.B. I would value that for myself. I find in myself the propensity to say too much about what I am struggling to express. Some people have the gift of putting things very concisely and I value that very much. I wondered if we see something of the depth of these resources in the first verse of chapter 5: "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink".

J.N.M. He was looking for the first signs of spring abundantly, beloved ones!" I wondered if that would be a little like what has been referred to. There is not openly the thought of irrigation, and these plants being watered by the flow of living waters, but there is what is available to His beloved ones for refreshment.

A.W. I know you have in mind the garden, but is this gathered up in a wider area? We can experience this during the week perhaps and elsewhere in reading and contemplation. Lebanon comes quite a bit into this. He has come from Lebanon and Lebanon is referred to in what you have read. Are these things gathered up and expanded in our hearts in view of this fragrance being released?

J.A.B. That is very fine. That helps me a little with verses 11 and 12 in chapter 6. "I went down into the garden of nuts, to see the verdure of the valley, to see whether the vine budded". There is exercise in relation to Him coming in here. What answer is there? What growth has there been? Has the vine budded? Is there verdure there? Is there freshness so that the pomegranates blossom? So it is encouraging that in that wider setting too there is an answer to Christ's heart: My soul set me upon the chariots of my willing people". Do you think that might be more extensive area to which you have referred? There is to be what is for the heart of Christ there as well as what is of privilege.

J.N.M. He was looking for the first signs of spring there, was He not? But He was surprised to find it was the season of fruitfulness.

J.A.B. What would you say then about this reference, "Before I was aware"? It is quoted sometimes on Lord's Day morning. It is hard to think of how the Lord Jesus, being who He is, could be taken unawares, but it almost indicates that. Does it refer to the spontaneity of the response?

G.B.G. There is what is awakened in us. It is what is there in the Person all the time, that can be touched and it is awakened. It is not something new coming in, but it is something that is already there and which can be touched. I wondered if that might relate to this wider area. Mary had a pound of ointment; she had it all ready.

J.A.B. That would link with what you said before about what is constitutional. We cannot expect to go on with carnal and worldly things during the week and expect to switch this on on Lord's Day morning, can we? It has to spring from what is there in moral formation, in exercise and then, as you say, it can be touched, and it yields.

J.C.G. The feelings of divine Persons come out in various types, do they not? The Spirit is mentioned in Genesis 24 as being astonished at the bride, for example. And you have a type in Boaz where Ruth is lying at the end of the heap of corn, and "the man was startled", Ruth 3: 8. I know it is a different setting, but it is the idea that there is a pleasant element of surprise.

J.A.B. Perhaps a little of that would come into John 12. The Lord Jesus clearly appreciated very much what Mary did, did He not? It was criticised later and He defends what she did, "Suffer her to have kept this for the day of my preparation for burial", (v 7). In character Mary was one of those who could be described as His willing people. She had this ointment, and she makes it available to Him, "and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment". It links with, "Before I was aware, my soul set me upon the chariots of my willing people".

J.C.G. So what has been said as to the pound of ointment is good. It is prepared and she had it ready. She may have thought it was small, but the fragrance which was released from it was tremendous, and the appreciation that the Lord had of it was paramount. Do you think that is the main thing? When we were younger, we said things that we did not fully understand, but the Lord has developed them as we have progressed. So the young people should not be afraid to give expression to simple impressions, a pound may be gathered up through the week.

J.A.B. Every impression of Christ, every desire to be pleasing to Him is infinitely precious to Him and none of it is missed by Him either. It all comes to His notice.

J.N.M. There are no tears here. What do you say about that?

J.A.B. I should like you to say. What would be the teaching in that?

J.N.M. It is another setting, and not this Mary but another woman, who wept at His feet and washed His feet; that is beautiful too. But this is John's gospel, and Mary is anointing the feet of the Son of God. It is priestly service in its highest dignity, is it not? To think that saints could be able to enter into that and anoint the feet of the Son of God! It is not here the clearing of sin or the gratitude to Jesus for what He has done as Saviour and Redeemer although, as you say, that is very precious and contributes towards what the ointment speaks of. But here it is the release of something which is peculiarly for His pleasure. What delight the Lord Jesus must have had in coming into this household, do you think?

J.A.B. And what delight the Father must have had at this point in His Son being appreciated as He deserved to be appreciated, before He died.

M.G.W. That is very precious. The note here says, 'Or "liquid"; a word difficult of interpretation, but most likely "pure". It may be that at this sublime moment we get something yielded that cannot be very clearly classified. I am wondering if there is something very precious about that; sometimes we feel that our contributions are maybe a bit muddled. Let us not worry about that! Let them come from the heart!

J.A.B. What you say is interesting. It is something that wells up: "My heart is welling forth with a good matter". What is "a good matter"? It is an impression of Christ. It is just a touch of His loveliness, what He is to me, or what He is to the assembly. It is a "good matter" and as long as it is about Him, it will be like the "ointment of pure nard" with the sweet odour which permeates the whole atmosphere in which it is released.

J.N.M. So does Mary carry this fragrance round with her?

J.A.B. That is interesting. You mean the fragrance is attached to those who release these impressions?

J.N.M. You could not be in this environment as a participator in this, without being deeply affected. Mary wiped His feet with her hair, so as she went around, she would carry that fragrance with her.

J.A.B. Well, I trust that we might see that this is still happening. We enjoyed something this morning. One of my exercises is that the fragrance of what we enjoyed should remain with us this week. This is the first day of another week. We are speaking now of very precious things and I trust that each one of us is affected in some way or other by what has been said, but particularly by what we enjoyed this morning. So it is to stay with us. It is the atmosphere of heaven really, is it not?

J.N.M. In this distinctive sense the Lord Jesus came and then He left us; He came in and then He went out. In another sense, of course, He is with us all the days. But the fragrance is left with those who knew His presence.

M.G.W. An ointment like this would have been compounded from a whole variety of spices, from things that had grown somewhere. So there is variety, things are gathered up, compounded together, and the ointment was the result. So let us gather up these impressions that we have on Lord's Day, and let us work at them because this will be the result. Is that so?

J.A.B. So today the south wind is blowing. Tomorrow it may be the north wind. But the result is to be the same: the spices flow forth.

J.N.M. We spoke about the Lord moving. It is His feet that are alluded to here. She recognises that, does not? I wondered whether there was something in the fact that it was His feet which were anointed, in relation to the preparation for burial that He is speaking about here, not as in Matthew and Mark where another woman in the house of Simon the leper anoints His head. As we know, He moves forward in John's gospel with the glory of the Son of God: no-one takes His life from Him. And Mary is in the understanding of that in some way.

J.A.B. That is good. This was just six days before His death. These feet were taking Him on to His death were they not? It is very affecting.

J.N.M. He was going into death, He was coming out of death, and He was going to the Father; He says "And now I come to Thee",

(John 17: 13). Do you think all that is involved in anointing His feet?
This woman was in the light of these things. How precious!

DUNDEE

Key to initials

J.A.Brown, Grangemouth; A.P.Grant, Dundee; G.B.Grant, Dundee;
J.C.Gray, Dundee; J.M.Macfarlane, Dundee; J.N.Mather, Dundee;
H.Taylor, Aberdeen; M.G.Wood, Dundee; A.Walker, Dundee

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

John Brown

Luke 23: 33,34,39-43, 46; Mark 15: 33-35; John 19: 28-30; 7: 37-39, 46

We spoke a little yesterday about divine speaking. I would like with the Holy Spirit's help, in this gospel meeting to speak to you about the words of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross. It seems to me that, especially to anyone who loves the Lord Jesus, these words of His as He actually hung on the cross must be very important and peculiarly affecting. I feel very weak in taking up such a holy subject, but I wish to point out, one at a time, the things which Jesus said while He hung on the cross. And I desire that the result in every one of our hearts here might be that God would be glorified as He was in the heart of that hard-bitten centurion who, with his band, had crucified Jesus. That man, I presume, had listened to each one of these words of Jesus as He hung there on the cross and as a result he glorified God and said, "Truly this man was Son of God". The words of Jesus, as He hung there, had affected him and if they can affect him, then they can affect anyone. I do not suppose you would get a more hard-bitten military man than a Roman centurion, responsible with his band for the crucifixion of these three men on Golgotha that day. But what Jesus said, and what He was as He hung there, got through the armour of that centurion, and in one account it says he glorified God. And in this account his words are "Truly this man was Son of God". I trust, dear friends, that as we listen to the words of Jesus as He hung there on the cross, there might be a similar effect in every heart here.

I began with Luke 23 because I would judge that that was the first thing that Jesus said, even as they were crucifying Him, "Father, forgive them". It says, "And when they came to the place which is called Skull" - that is Golgotha - "there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, the other on the left". "There they crucified him": I take it that means the band of soldiers. It was

their job to do it. You know what they did, do you not? I am speaking of the cross and of the crucifixion of Jesus, a terrible death! You know what it was, do you not? The cross was laid out on the ground and the person was laid on it and the nails hammered through the hands and feet and then the cross was lifted up and placed in a socket in the ground. That is why the Lord spoke of Himself as being lifted up. He was literally lifted up on that awful means of death and He was left there to die with these other two men. That is what they did to Jesus. "There they crucified him".

And what does He say? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". Just let these words sink in! As Jesus hung there, the first thing that he said was, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do". Oh, what a wonderful thing it is to be able to preaching forgiveness! Whoever you are, whatever you have done, this is God's attitude to you, forgiveness. I thank God for that. I could not stand here and speak of these things unless that was so.

Jesus expressed it here, even to these men who had done this to Him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".

However bad you have been, dear friend, whatever you have done, you have not done anything as wicked as this. They crucified the Lord of glory, and God in His love and in His forgiveness, as expressed in these words of Jesus, was prepared as the scripture tells us elsewhere, to treat it as a sin of ignorance. And, indeed, these words imply that: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". The Jews thought they knew what they were doing, getting rid of this so-called deceiver who claimed to be the king of the Jews. And the Romans thought they knew what they were doing, appeasing the Jewish rabble so that there would not be trouble in this outpost of the empire. But they did not know what they were doing: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". All of God's love for man is contained in these words and these words come to us tonight with all the appeal that they had when they were uttered by Jesus on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". And that forgiveness is available to you, whatever you have done. It may be that you have spurned the word until now. It may be that you have heard the gospel often and rejected it and

said, this is not for me. Well, tonight God is willing to forgive you on the basis of the work of Jesus on that cross and He is willing to forgive you in the same spirit as Jesus expressed here, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".

Are you going to take advantage of the opportunity that you have tonight and you may never have again? This happened nearly two thousand years ago, a long, long time ago, and all the time since then God has been toward man in forgiveness. Hundreds of millions of persons throughout these nearly two millennia have come and found in God a forgiving and loving God, found in Christ a Saviour for sinners whose work on that cross was enough, more than enough to cover what they had done and what there were. I have found that.

Have you? I can say that. I have found that what I have done and, even more terrible, what I am, Jesus dealt with it all in His precious work at Calvary. This forgiveness, dear friend, I commend to you. If you have never put your trust in Jesus, do it now while the opportunity is open to you! Nearly two thousand years have passed since these words were spoken and the opportunity is open tonight.

I cannot say that it will be open next week. You often have heard the preacher say that, but sometimes it is true. There are some who have been at a preaching one week and then they have not been at a preaching the next week. I do not know what this coming week holds but I do know this, that God in His mercy towards us is offering us free forgiveness and pardon through believing in the precious Saviour. May you, if you have not done it before, come as this thief did and put your trust in Jesus and have this personal link with Him!

I have been speaking of these words of Jesus and they are wonderful words but then the thief gets the benefit for himself personally. The forgiveness of God is available to all men tonight.

How many people there are in the world, thousands of millions, and the forgiveness of God is available to all of them. And so the Lord Jesus on the cross said, "Father, forgive them" and He really meant all men. The love of God was available, the forgiveness of God expressed in His beloved Son, was available to all men, "Father forgive them". He was referring to those who had crucified Him, but

He was embracing all men and God had them all in His heart at that moment. But God deals with us as individuals. This man who had been beside Jesus got the gain of it as an individual. That is what you need to do and that is what I have to do. I can say I have. I know that most of us in this room tonight can say that, but I trust that everyone can say that.

"Now one of the malefactors who had been hanged spoke insultingly". Can you imagine this scene? There was Jesus in the middle and there was a malefactor on each side, and they were speaking about Him as the Lord hung there. Can you imagine what that meant? One of them began to insult the Lord as He was hanging there in the middle. I speak very reverently, but this is what happened. Jesus hung there and heard this man speak insultingly: "Art not thou the Christ? save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost *thou* too not fear God ... and we indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done" And then this wonderful confession - how did this man know? - "but this man has done nothing amiss". Oh, what a wonderful confession that was, about the only One of whom that could be said: "but this man has done nothing amiss". "And he said to Jesus, Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom". First of all, he recognised his own guilt and you have to do that. Before you can come and know the blessedness of the saving grace of Jesus, you have to realise that you need it. You have to realise that you need a Saviour, that you need salvation. So before this thief said, "But this man has done nothing amiss", he said, "And we indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done". Now what he was doing was acknowledging that he was a sinner and that he could not help himself. That was obvious; he was about to die. A few hours later this man would be dead on that cross, but before he died, he put his trust in the Saviour who hung beside him on that cross of shame. He says "Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom".

Then the second thing that Jesus said on the cross was in reply "Verily I say to thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise". Dear

friend, put your trust in Christ, believe in what I am saying to you, that Jesus is the Son of God. I put it in the present tense: "Truly this man was Son of God". The centurion put it in the past tense because the Lord had died. I would put it in the present tense: this Man is the Son of God. If you believe that and if you believe that He hung there for you, that He died for you, that He shed His precious blood for you, then this promise that Jesus made to that malefactor on the cross is made to you.

Well, the Lord Jesus went to paradise first. He died before this malefactor did. He was the first. He has the pre-eminence in all things. It must be. The malefactor did not go to paradise exactly at the same time. The Lord Jesus died first. Remember how, when the soldiers came to break their legs - another example of the cruelty of these military men - they discovered that the Lord Jesus had already died. They did not need to break His legs. They broke the legs of this poor thief and then he died, then he was in paradise with his Saviour. Oh, dear friend, I trust these things affect you. I trust these words of Jesus affect you: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". And then, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise".

Then there came these three awful hours of darkness on the cross. We turn now to Mark's gospel, "And when the sixth hour was come, there came darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour". The hymn says,

None could follow there bless Saviour...

Darkness, wrath and curse were Thine (Hymn 298).

We will never know all that transpired in these three hours, but I can say and I hope you can say, that one of the things that happened in these three hours was that He bore my sins. He bore every one of my sins. All the waves and billows of God's anger against sin rolled against Him and who can say what He bore? The eternal age will not exhaust the response to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. The psalm that we were reading this afternoon, Psalm 22, speaks typically in very beautiful and affecting language of these sufferings of Jesus, "Why art thou far from my salvation, from the words of my

groaning? My God, I cry by day, and thou answerest not; and by night, and there is no rest for me". I trust that these sufferings of the Lord Jesus always affect you. Then at the end of these three hours, "Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" He said these words on the cross; it was a cry for forsaking. They are recorded as the very words that Jesus used, in the original language that He used; they are recorded here for us so that they might make a deep impression in our souls. I think these are among the most profound words in the Holy Scriptures, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" That is what Jesus actually said. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? " Oh, dear friend, He was forsaken for me. There were many other things that were accomplished there but I trust that you can say that He was forsaken for me. "Why hast thou forsaken me?" I trust you can answer that question yourself and say, He had to do that for me. He had to bear these things for me. And yet all these waves and billows rolled against Him during these three hours but He was not overwhelmed by them. We were reading on Wednesday evening in Psalm 102 and the heading of the Psalm is "A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed..." Jesus was never overwhelmed. He carried our sorrows. He bore our griefs. He bore my sins in His body on the tree. Oh, what a wonderful thing that is! Praise be His name! That Jesus hung there, He was forsaken of God, He bore the sins of all who have trusted in Him and He was not overwhelmed. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was forsaken of His Father. Think of the awfulness of that. Think of the perfection of the complacency that there had been, of the relationships, and then that communion interrupted for these three awful hours of darkness: the relationship still there, of course, but the communion interrupted for these three hours when Jesus bore your sins. I trust it is so. I trust you can say that. I trust that if you have not been able to say that before, that you will say it now, He bore my sins in His body on that terrible, shameful cross.

The next thing that Jesus said on the cross is recorded in John 19. "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now finished..."

The crucifixion, these three hours of darkness, the awful forsaking of God, and now it is at an end. He has not been overwhelmed.

"Knowing that all things were now finished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, says, I thirst ... When therefore Jesus had received the vinegar, he said It is finished". The work of Jesus was finished there. Of course, He had to go into the grave, that the scripture might be fulfilled, three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. But His work as far as dealing with sin and sins was concerned, was finished there: "It is finished". Oh, what precious words these are to the believer in the Lord Jesus. He bore my sins. He exhausted the wrath of God. He bore it and He finished the work. What a wonderful thing that is! How our hearts would exult that Jesus bore all of these things and He finished the work. That work is a completed work and God is well pleased with it, "who by the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God", Heb 9: 14. Jesus did that and now He says, "It is finished". And He is in control. Men thought that they were crucifying this Man who they said claimed to be the king of the Jews, but He was in control: He delivered up His spirit. He went into death by delivering up His own spirit. I trust you will be affected by that and see the magnitude of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. I trust you have some sense too of the magnitude of your contribution to His hanging there. I trust that we might be increased in our apprehension of this; that all that I have done, the sins I have committed and what I am after nature, all contributed to Jesus hanging there. And may we all have a fresh impression of the magnitude of that work being finished and God being well pleased!

And now we go back to Mark 15 and we see there the result of this speaking on the cross. The centurion was affected as he saw these things and heard them. "And the centurion who stood by over against him, when he saw that he had expired having thus cried out, said, Truly this man was Son of God". He was affected by the death of Jesus. Are you affected by it? Are you affected by the way that your Lord and Saviour went into death? I am speaking to you now as a believer. I trust that everyone here has put their trust in the Lord Jesus. But are you affected freshly by the way that He went? This

man was. Oh, that there might be more glory to God as a result of being affected by these words of Jesus on the cross. That is my own desire from this meeting, that I might be more deeply affected. Even the profundity of these words is well known to us. We read these verses often, we speak often about the sufferings of Jesus and it is good that we do so. But it is good to allow them to affect us deeply and inwardly, as this man was affected so that he "glorified God", Luke 23: 47. I think that it is a wonderful thing that this Roman centurion was able, having taken account of what was said and what happened at the cross, to glorify God and say, "Truly this man was Son of God". Dear friend, if you have not responded to these words of Jesus, respond now and put your trust and faith in Him!

Now in John 7 I read about another occasion when Jesus cried. These cries of Jesus on the cross, of course, stand by themselves. But here in John 7: 37 it says "Jesus stood and cried saying, If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink". I would like to ask you, have you responded to this cry? You may know the preciousness of a link with Jesus as your Saviour. I trust you do, even the very youngest here who can understand my words. "He that believes on me", Jesus cried, "as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this he said concerning the Spirit, which they that believed on him were about to receive". Have you believed on Him? Are you consciously the recipient of the Holy Spirit? What a wonderful thing that Jesus cried in this way. He stood in the last, the great day of the feast, and cried out to those around saying, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink". We were speaking this afternoon of these living waters that spring up. If you have ever had an impression of Jesus, if you have ever felt a response to God welling up in your heart, then that is by the Spirit. But if you have never felt that living power in you, then ask the Father to give you the Spirit. He is available to all those who believe, "which they that believed on him were about to receive". The Holy Spirit came consequent on the exaltation of Christ. The work of Jesus on that cross was great and glorious and it stands alone and it will stand alone throughout eternity. But God in His mercy and His grace has

also made provision for us that we might be maintained in the good of these things and so this offer of the Holy Spirit is being made tonight in the gospel. You can have salvation, yes, but you can also have the gift of the Holy Spirit in your life, making you live in relation to God and His things.

Well, may we all have an enhanced appreciation of the words of Jesus and may they affect us! I read verse 46 because I was affected by it, "Never man spoke thus, as this man speaks". The officers had gone back and the chief priests said, "Why have you not brought him?" And they said, 'We could not do anything. The crowds would not have allowed us to touch Him.' "Never man spoke thus, as this man speaks". Every word of Jesus is precious. I have spoken to you tonight about these words of Jesus as He hung on the cross.

May they affect you! May they produce an effect in every heart here, a desire to be more committed to Him in the scene which characteristically is still crucifying Him. By that I mean, it is still casting Him out. It still rejects Him. The world that rejected Christ is characteristically the same as it is now. The whole system of things in general is still against the Lord Jesus, and those who desire to be true to Him have to make their way through that world and the Holy Spirit is the only power for that. "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water". That is the way to be sustained here until very soon we will hear the assembling shout that we were speaking of yesterday: "Come, Lord Jesus", Rev 22: 20.

May there be an answer in every heart here to these words of the Lord Jesus as He hung suffering there on that cross of shame, and may there too be a realisation of how much we need the Holy Spirit! For His Name's sake.

DUNDEE

8 December 1996