

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

1st Series

No. 318

September 1999

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Edited and Published by

E.C.Burr,

50 Red Post Hill, London SE24 9JQ

IN STEP

Paul Devenish

Numbers 9: 1-3, 6-11; Mark 5: 21-23; Luke 22: 31, 32, 55-57, 61, 62; 24: 34; John 20: 24-28; 1 Thessalonians 4: 15-18

God has graciously made provision for us that we might keep in step together. Numbers is a very interesting book involving the movements of the children of Israel from one encampment to another. You get the introduction in the earlier chapter of Eleazar, the prince of princes of the Levites (ch 3: 32); Eleazar, the son of Aaron in chapter 4. Aaron was still the priest in those days officially, but Eleazar is introduced, the priesthood viewed spiritually as having oversight over the levitical families in view of everything being carried through intact. He is called a prince, the prince of princes; the thought of what is princely is accentuated, no doubt alluding to Christ. But then the character of things seen in Eleazar is to be amongst us. He would be concerned that everyone is carried through with no losses; that everything is carried through without deterioration. So he would have charge of the families of the Kohathites and the Merarites and the Gershonites, the Kohathites having to do with the precious things of God, the ark, that there should be no depreciation of the precious things of God. Someone told us years ago that Timothy was a Kohathite, Titus was a Gershonite and Philemon was a Merarite. Paul had the oversight, you might say, as Eleazar. We need to be concerned that these things are carried through untarnished and that *everyone is in step*.

In the Song of Songs it says, "Who is this, she that cometh up from the wilderness ...?" (ch 3: 6), and then later, "Who is this, that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (ch 8: 5). The first reference involves that she is unaffected by the wilderness journey. "Like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?", a lovely suggestion of the assembly coming through the wilderness journey, coming up out of the wilderness in freshness and power, unaffected by the long, tedious journey that the wilderness implies. The element of spiritual

priesthood and princeliness is to be found amongst us. So as we come up, whether immediately on the morrow, or finally, when the Lord comes for us, we come up in freshness and power, not affected adversely by the wilderness journey.

I have read about certain persons who, because of certain circumstances, were hindered from holding the Passover in the first month. But there was a desire with them. They said to Moses, Why are we kept back? Jehovah makes provision for them. If they could not hold the Passover in the first month, they could hold it in the second month; that is, there is provision made for the desire that was in their hearts to hold the Passover, but it was to be with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Of course their holding the Passover would involve an appreciation of the sufferings of Christ: Paul says "For also our Passover, Christ, has been sacrificed; so that let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and wickedness, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth", 1 Cor 5: 7,8. We do not have the literal Passover now: we have its moral meaning, but we have the Lord's supper. Do you have a desire to remember the Lord Jesus? He says, "This do in remembrance of me", 1 Cor 11: 24. You say, Well, my circumstances are not right at the moment, but I would tell you that the Lord has made provision for you so that you can keep the feast.

But there needs to be with us a readiness to take it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. So it says in Corinthians as we were saying, "not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and wickedness, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth". You see how the Lord has made provision for our desire to come up to the Supper and to remember the Lord Jesus. A wonderful thing! There is no doubt that Jehovah took account of the desire of the hearts of these men and provided for them.

I think in Numbers we are on a journey. It says in Deuteronomy, "Remember what Amalek did unto thee on the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; how he met thee on the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, all the feeble that lagged behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary, and he feared not God", Deut 25:

17,18. If we lag behind we become vulnerable to the attacks of Satan through the weakness of the flesh. We know what that is, all of us know what that is. But the Israelites were on a journey. We are on a journey, beloved, and we are to go in rank; you might say it is a military idea in Numbers. In Exodus the people moved *family-wise*. What a wonderful thing that is to consider, at the time of the Passover the people moved family-wise! If one household was not great enough for the lamb it was to be shared – it speaks about one lamb for a house, “And if the household be too small for a lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of souls”, Exod 12: 4. I suppose we would all say we are perhaps too small for the lamb, we need the brethren, we need one another. “Your lamb” – a beautiful reference to Christ – “shall be without blemish”. I think they went out family-wise from Egypt. That is a fine thing to think about, beloved, that we go out family-wise from Egypt; not one was to be left behind. The little ones are not to be left behind. Let us just think about that, think of our households.

Some of us must think about them with sorrow. But let us have it before us that we go out family-wise and that we have those with whom we can share the lamb, “your lamb”. Let us feed upon the Lamb in our households and go out family-wise. In Numbers it is more a military operation.

In Mark’s gospel it is the family. Jairus says, “My little daughter”. He besought Him, he says, “My little daughter”. In Mark it is *the way*, it is the Christian way really, it goes on to the Acts.

They followed Him in the way, it says, the way of suffering. But you might say in this section we want the little daughter to be with us, “My little daughter”. The Lord was thinking about *the way* and persons being restored and recovered in view of being in the way. It says about the blind man Bartimaeus that he followed Him in the way, Mark 10: 52. It is a way involving suffering. But let us not leave the little daughter behind, let the little daughter be brought into the way. It says later in the chapter, “And having laid hold of the hand of the child, he says to her, Talitha kumi, which is interpreted, Damsel, I say to thee, Arise. And immediately the damsel arose and walked,

for she was twelve years old. And they were astonished with great astonishment. And he charged them much that no one should know this; and he desired that something should be given her to eat” (vv 41-43). But it says she walked, that is she was ready to come into the way, the suffering way. Let us leave Egypt family-wise and let us not leave the little daughter behind. Do not leave the little ones behind. That is one thing that Moses said, he would not leave them behind. Let us not leave them behind. So it says she walked, “and he desired that something should be given her to eat”. We may say this would involve food in the household but may be we could apply it to the Lord’s supper. Mark stresses the thought of eating: “Jesus having taken bread ... said Take this”, Mark 14: 22. It gives us strength for the way, for the suffering way, out of the world, going out of the world in Exodus, out of the world with the little ones. Let us not leave them behind; “My little daughter”. I can just understand and feel how the longing of his heart would come into that expression, “My little daughter”, I do not want to leave her behind. We are in the way, we are in the way with Christ, it is a suffering way, let us take the little ones with us. He besought Him. I think that is a crying out on the part of a father that loves his little daughter. The Lord understands. And so she walked with them in the way.

I now allude to Peter. The Lord anticipated Peter’s need; we might speak of it as his defection, when he denied the Lord. The Lord said, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat”; that would be all the disciples, but then He says, “but I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not”. Priestly service comes to light in this gospel. Peter was not to be left behind; he was to be in the front rank; first Peter. You see him in the Acts standing up in power with the eleven. The Lord in His priestly service is praying for him; He says, “I have besought for thee”, the feelings of Christ entering into His priestly intercession. No one of us should lose our way in the testimony of the Lord. The Lord had a remarkable place in mind for Peter in the testimony and He personally serves him. “I have besought for thee” -think of the Father taking account of the beseeching of the heart of Jesus for

Simon; “I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not”. Then He looks at him. Peter finds his place in the house of the high priest; it says he followed afar off. How sad when persons follow afar off! How vulnerable they are! We spoke about that – Deuteronomy 25; the feeble that lagged behind were vulnerable. We are vulnerable, beloved, if we follow afar off. Then it says, “And they having lit a fire in the midst of the court and sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid, having seen him sitting by the light, and having fixed her eyes upon him, said, And this man was with him. But he denied him, saying, “Woman, I do not know him”. See how far we can get away? I would urge the young and all of us to keep near to Christ. If something comes in let us quickly get back to Him. That is what we sang in our hymn:

Still sweet ‘tis to discover
If clouds have dimmed my sight,
When passed, eternal Lover,
Towards me, as e’er, Thou’rt bright. (Hymn 51)

How wonderful! The Lord is the same and He is serving us in a priestly way. And we should be moving with the encampments. It is wonderful to move with the encampments. In Numbers chapter 10 the ark goes before to bring them into rest. You would not want to miss that. So it says, “The Lord, turning round”. Have you ever had that experience, the Lord turning round and looking at you? I suppose the expression in His face would be one of compassion.

Perhaps of reproach, but His look would be full of love and compassion. It broke the heart of Peter and brought him back; it says, “going forth without, wept bitterly”. In chapter 24 the Lord is bringing forward the fact that Simon is a recovered man. Such grace in this verse, “the Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon”.

Would the brethren say that Peter denied the Lord? I think they would have some sense of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, I think it would flood into their souls as these words were being said, “The Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon”. Simon was to have his place in the movements of the testimony, in the encampments in the Acts. He would have a distinguished place. It

says, first Peter, in the movements of the testimony in the Acts. He was not to be out of rank, he was to be in rank, he was to be in step and he was a testimony to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, I would commend that to us.

I read about Thomas. He missed this wonderful gathering. It says, "Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came", not that he was not there – someone said that years ago – not that he was not there but he was not *with* them when Jesus came. I think the disciples missed him too. It says, "The other disciples therefore said to him, We have seen the Lord".

They did not criticise him, Why were you not at the meeting? You missed the meeting. Why did you miss the meeting? No. What did they say? "We have seen the Lord". How Thomas would, I suppose, feel the concern and the love of the brethren, the other disciples. But still he was unbelieving. Oh, beloved, do not hold yourself aloof from the sufferings of Christ, put your hand in there.

Of course he represents the Jew, we know that, but it also says he was one of the twelve, showing that these verses are for our edification, we of the assembly, those who are seeking to walk in the light of the assembly. It says, "Thomas, one of the twelve". I think we want to see that the Lord would graciously give us the experience that Thomas experienced. I think we often hold ourselves aloof.

The Lord Jesus says to him, "Bring thy finger here and see my hands". Think of that! Mr. Taylor said about Colossians 2 verse 14 – "having effaced the handwriting in ordinances which stood out against us, which was contrary to us, he has taken it also out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" – there may be an allusion to the hands of Jesus in that, "having nailed it to the cross"; the nails that were put into His hands. "Having nailed it to the cross" involves the sufferings of Christ, involving the hands of Jesus being nailed to the cross. Well, let us not hold ourselves aloof from the sufferings of Jesus. We would affect our hearts deeply. I think He affected Thomas' heart deeply; "bring thy hand and put it into my side; and be not unbelieving, but believing. Thomas answered and said to him,

My Lord and my God". What wonderful words that poured out of Thomas' mouth, "My Lord and my God".

One just suggests these scriptures that we might be all together. In this wonderful scripture in Thessalonians we are all together. As we are looking for the Lord to come, whether to come for us or to come tomorrow; we look for that; a wonderful occasion, the Lord's supper, we want to be together, unified, hearts that are marked by sincerity and truth, persons that have eaten the Passover and have been profoundly affected by the sufferings of the Lamb roast with fire, and have eaten the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, and have eaten the bitter herbs involving self-judgment. We are keeping step, we are in rank. If we have fallen out the Lord has made provision for our recovery and restoration to be *with them* when Jesus comes. Well, just a suggestion that the Lord may encourage our hearts. In the name of the Lord Jesus.

NEW YORK

20 March 1999

THE CROSS

David Hutson

John 12: 27-33; Galatians 6: 12-16; Ephesians 2: 14-18; Philippians 3: 18, 20, 21

I think it would be clear that one desires to speak about the cross, something, perhaps, that we do not speak enough about. Yet, as Paul says, “the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us that are saved it is God’s power”, 1 Cor 1: 18. On considering this, one has thought of it as entering into the counsels of God. We speak of the death of Christ in that way, but the manner of His death was according to the divine counsel, “given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2: 23). He was delivered up, but taken by the hands of lawless men and crucified, and slain; not only slain, but crucified. It is according to “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”. It was that manner of death, that ignominious, shameful death which was in the counsels of God in view of securing His end.

So, the Lord Jesus Himself spoke of it, “I, if I be lifted up out of the earth”. How many times it has been said that it was morally impossible that He should die on the earth where He had glorified God. He Himself could say later “I have glorified *thee* on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it”, John 17: 4. He was lifted up out of the earth, that He should die, lifted up as crucified. Thank God that there is the further meaning to it. He is lifted up now, ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things, and there He is an attractive object for all our hearts.

He would have us attracted to Him, and secure our affections, even as He has demonstrated His in the way that He died. So that the cross, as has been said, was where man’s heart was exposed, but where God’s heart was revealed. All that man was, all that I am, all that you are according to flesh and according to nature, was there at its very worst. But all that God is according to His nature in love was there, providing the way in which you and I, sinners away from God,

at eternal distance apart from that great work which was accomplished on the cross, might be saved.

I make no apology at a time like this when addressing so many, to appeal as to whether everyone here has yet got the gain of the death of Jesus, whether everyone here has yet put their trust in the crucified Saviour, whether everyone here has yet come under the shelter of that precious blood, which those of us who are saved and have put our trust in Him, can say cleanses us from every sin. He died for you, dear friend. He died for all, "one died for all, then all have died" (2 Cor. 5:14), because you were dead and in eternal distance from God apart from that work which He has accomplished. He died to reach you where you were and to bring you from those depths of darkness into the light of God. What a Saviour! Do you trust Him? Has everyone here trusted Him? As it were, I turn aside, if it is turning aside, just to present the Saviour, lest any here should be hiding in the trees of the garden thinking that because you are in a company like this you are all right. It is a question of our individual links, and that link begins with putting your trust in the crucified Saviour, but putting your trust in Him where He is now glorified, the One who was "delivered for our offences and has been raised for our justification", Rom 4: 25.

What a work was accomplished! He says, "now shall the prince of this world be cast out". What a victory it was! The prince of this world is not referred to again. Paul refers to the God of this world (see 2 Cor 4: 4). The prince of this world has been cast out, and Jesus, by the way He has been, has established His rights over the world, rights that He had as Creator, but rights that He has established by redemption through His precious death, the shedding of His precious blood. The prince of this world has been cast out, but sadly men still regard him as "the god of this world", still there is idolatry, still there is that in the world under the power of Satan which takes the place of God in men's hearts and keeps them away from Him – "in whom the god of this world has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, so that the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine forth for them"

(see 2 Cor 4: 4). The knowledge of the glory of God is in the face of Jesus Christ. What a solemn thing it is not to believe, that is to refuse the gospel. Not simply not to have heard, but to refuse it. The god of this world has an advantage over such, but the prince of this world has been cast out.

“I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all to me” – Does it attract you, that the blessed Saviour, the One who came from the heights of glory in infinite love was lifted up on the cross? If one nearest and dearest to us were to suffer, we should be moved by it, but think of the One who has come so near to meet such as you and me in our distance from God, coming in love and suffering such a death. Does it affect us? I want to speak of the effect of it upon us, the effect of the word of the cross. Is it the power of God unto salvation for you? I want to speak of all that it would bring you into.

Perhaps we are afraid to face it because of the negative side of things, and sometimes that side of things we avoid. It is attractive to face the truth of the cross because of what it opens up to us. There is that which is in us, which would forever hinder us from having part in these wonderful things which God has prepared for those that love Him, and the cross is the answer to all that would hinder so that we might have free entrance and free access to the great thoughts of God.

Some of us were reminded earlier of the great things of God, and we are measured as to what we can say about them. This word “things”, as we have often commented, sets our minds, under the power of the Spirit, questioning as to what they are; they are not defined, but to be explored, felt and experienced, rather than taught in doctrine, the great things of God; the things that God has prepared for those that love Him. They are all opened up to us because of Jesus having died on the cross. It becomes attractive. Everything contrary has been put out of sight; everything has been removed so that we might have free access and liberty into all that God has purposed in His heart for those that love Him.

In Ephesians it speaks of these differences that exist among us. What a mixed company we are, all sorts of people here today,

with all our peculiarities, mine included. But the cross has ended it all, they have all been annulled. As it says, He has reconciled “both in one body to God by the cross, having slain the enmity”. Everyone was there, Hebrew, Latin and Greek, the religious man, the political man, the philosopher, whatever it might be, however man would aspire in ambition for a place in the world, it was all there, nailed to the cross. The wonder of it is that according to the counsel of God, I say carefully and reverently, and I trust affectionately, Jesus was nailed to the cross in order that all that might be annulled forever, that the enmity might be annulled – “having slain the enmity”. Then that work having been accomplished, having died, having been buried, having been raised again, having been glorified, He has come in the Spirit preaching glad tidings, to us who were afar off, us poor sinners that are Gentiles, so that we might know no distance between ourselves and God so that through Him we have “both access by one Spirit to the Father”. How wonderful that is! The work of the cross has effected it. It was the death of Jesus, He died for me, “the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me”, Gal 2: 20. But it was the cross, I want to emphasise *the cross*, that death. Does it not affect your heart that the One who died for you, the One who loved you so much that He was prepared to die for you, “the Son of God who has loved me and given himself for me”, died on the cross – that kind of death? Does it not move you, does it not affect you? It affects you in relation to the world, “persecuted because of the cross of Christ”. Not persecuted simply because of Christ, but because of the cross of Christ. Paul could speak to the Galatians earlier of Christ being portrayed crucified among them. What was seen in Paul, in that sense, was a crucified man. He was not afraid of the reproach of the cross, he was persecuted on account of the cross of Christ. He had no part in that order of things to which those poor Galatians were reverting, which would make something of the man who was crucified there, whose place Jesus took. He says that Jesus Christ was portrayed before them as crucified among them. What portrayal is there in me? Is there anything of that man who was judged at the cross seen in me as I move among the brethren, or as I move in the world? This truth has

no place in the world. Philippians 2 shows us “the mind that was in Christ Jesus”. I believe that, as we have the truth of the cross before us, and as we hold to it and realise the import of it, that mind would be in us. We have often been reminded of the note where it speaks of the contrast with the first man, the man with his ambitions, the man seeking a place in the world. The mind that was in Christ Jesus was the mind to go down, the mind to become obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross. That was the death that Jesus died. As I align myself with Him, there is no place for me in the world. Is there any place for you in the world? Are you popular amongst your colleagues? It is testing to us all. These things are real. We want to be practical. The word of the cross is the power of God unto salvation to those that believe, salvation from all that is in the world, because the world is crucified, as Paul says, to me. That is what the world is to me, on the cross “the world is crucified to me: and I to the world”. The world that had no place for that blessed Man on the cross, has no place for me, I am crucified to the world.

So it says, “For in Christ Jesus”. How wonderful that is! Everything secured in another Man, in another world, according to the purpose of God. It makes way for the enjoyment, the experience, of what it is to be “in Christ Jesus”. It refers to the work of God in us, according to new creation. That is where “neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision; but new creation”. This is the way to the experience of it. This is the way in which it will come into expression, as we are faithful in relation to the cross of Christ, “that the world is crucified to me, and I to the world”, as Paul could say. Is that true of me? Everyone of us should ask what is the effect of it on me. It is intensely personal. I believe, that a present voice of the Spirit is as to our personal relationships, and I believe that one matter that cannot be emphasised too much is the cross of Jesus.

Paul took it up personally, “far be it from me to boast save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world”. But then it goes on to “in Christ Jesus neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision; but new creation. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace upon them

and mercy, and upon the Israel of God". Think of the walk of the Christian, the Spirit being the instrument and power, "if we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit". So new creation is coming into expression and what we are as before God, the other having been removed forever, and he says "peace upon them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God". Israel was a chosen people, a people for a possession. I believe it would link with what it says in that dark day in the end of Malachi, "they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another ... And they shall be unto me a peculiar treasure ... in the day that I prepare", Mal 3: 16, 17. Think of the peculiar treasure it is to Christ, and to God to see persons who are walking according to this rule, according to the rule of new creation, "peace upon them and mercy", and the way to it is by the word of the cross.

I read in Philipians because this may be more testing to us. The world is one thing. It encroaches in one way and another, and makes it's appeal, but then what about the earth He was lifted up out of the earth. "Enemies of the cross of Christ ... who mind earthly things". What is the bent of our minds? This has been raised recently, more than once, What is the bent of our minds? We have to touch earthly things: you have to go to work, you have to earn a living, you have to have a house, and you almost have to have a car; but where is your mind? You may have to have something in the bank in order to fulfil righteousness, but where is your mind? Is your mind in the bank, is your mind on your car, on your house – or on your garden, perhaps more testing still? And yet it has to be kept in order. It speaks about going "by the field of a sluggard", Prov 24: 30. We would not like to be a sluggard publicly; it is part of the testimony. We have to regard these things rightly, but where is the mind? What is the bent of the mind? Jesus was lifted up out of the earth, signifying by what death He was about to die. Can your mind be on the earth, out of which Jesus was lifted up to be crucified? "Enemies of the cross of Christ", it says, not enemies of Christ. Paul would no doubt be speaking of believers, for he says, "I tell you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ". Let us guard these things. Not to be

unbalanced, if I can use that word, for we have to be here in the world, but we have, let us remind ourselves, the service of our great High Priest above, so that we might be helped in these things. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit here, and we have the word of God in its living and operative character. How much there is to help us! We are not cast upon our own resources. We have infinite resource in Christ and in the Spirit, so that we might be walking so as to please Him, so that we might be in these days before our translation like Enoch, who had the testimony that he pleased God.

Then it says (for there is something far greater to have your mind on), “for *our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens, from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour”. How soon is He coming? Do we realise? How often it has been said? Oh that one felt it more, the reality of it, the actuality of it, that it could be that we do not get home today, because He comes! He is coming for us, “we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour”. I often reflect on Mr Parker’s reference in this city to the last act of His Saviourhood.

We shall not need a Saviour in heaven. We shall have the Saviour, we shall be able to say eternally “we have Thee Jesus still”, but there is nothing to be saved from in heaven. The last act of His Saviourhood will be to save us out of these mortal conditions, out of these bodies of humiliation and to transform them into conformity to His body of glory. What a prospect! What a thing to set your mind on – “set your mind on things above where the Christ is”. Our commonwealth is there, it has its existence in the heavens. This is one of the things above, where the Christ is, “sitting at the right hand of God”, and the power that He has. It is not the power that He is going to acquire or to be given, it is the power that He has to subdue all things to Himself. He has power to come today, just waiting the word that He might come with that assembling shout, the voice of archangel, and the trump of God. The dead in Christ shall rise first. Our brother who has died may yet not be buried.

A brother told me once that he was following a coffin to a grave, and the husband of the sister who was being buried was muttering to himself as they walked along, and he drew near to him

to see what he was saying. He was saying, 'They may not bury her yet'. So much on his heart was the imminence of the Lord's return, that he thought she might not even get into the grave. There will be such (it could be our brother), being carried to the grave, but they do not get there, caught up, "the dead in Christ". Some in the grave, some on the way to their graves, and "we the living". That was said nearly two thousand years ago, "we the living who remain to the coming of the Lord". What a prospect! Our commonwealth is there now. It is not going to heaven when we die, "*our* commonwealth has its existence in the heavens".

I trust that saying these things might have set our minds on these things that are above. It might have taken your mind off some of the things that might be occupying you, some of these mundane things down here, so that you might have your mind on things above, and you might be looking more actively, more lovingly, more affectionately, for the Saviour who is coming so soon, "according to the working of the power which he has even to subdue all things to himself". May the prospect of it quicken our affections toward Him and may it help us not to shun facing what is involved in the cross of Jesus. For His name's sake, Amen.

LONDON

15 May 1999

PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD

Willie Lamont

Genesis 3: 14,15; Luke 4: 13, 24: 49-46; Acts 2: 34-36

I want to say a short word as to how God has met the great issue of good and evil that comes in so early in the history of humanity. I am sure everyone here knows about the issue between good and evil. It has come down to the present time and the battle between good and evil is in your heart and mine, but God has met it in His own way.

We know that here the serpent is an allusion to Satan, to the devil. I trust everyone realises that there is an active evil person called Satan, the devil, and he is against everything that God is doing, and against anything that God may be doing in your soul. I do not know how long it was from the time that God put Adam and Eve into the garden before corruption came in. Scripture does not reveal but it came in early. God's enemy, your enemy, and the issue arose as to good or evil. The conflict has been going on ever since. If you go into any library in this world you will find section after section on the wars that have been, the conflicts there have been; Scripture itself gives us them, the many conflicts there have been. From Genesis right through, there is great conflict, David and the Philistines, David and Goliath, all symbolic of this great conflict between good and evil. How is it to be met? Can you meet it? Can the greatest man that ever lived meet it? Never. All have come under the effects of the work of the devil. He works in two ways. The devil is a great adversary, Satan, he works so subtly. Here God addresses the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall crush thy head, and thou shalt crush his heel". You might say, who is the writer speaking of?

My friend, so early again, there is indication of how God would meet the matter. The woman's seed is a prophetic reference to the Lord Jesus. Who else could meet the great issue of good and evil, who else but He, the holy perfect One, could take up the matter of good and evil, the matter of sin and sins, and meet it for the glory of God, and then for your blessing and mine? Only one Man could do it, the

holy precious Saviour, the One who came in as a babe of whom it said “the holy thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God”, Luke 1: 35. Not as the Authorised Version puts it, “Born of thee”, but “born”. Mary was simply the vessel by which he entered into the world, the holy precious Saviour, “the holy thing also which shall be born”. He was never contaminated by the issue of good and evil, but He was the One who could settle it, never affected by sin and its awful consequences, never corrupted by it. “The ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing” (see John 14: 30). The wonder of it, the glorious Man on the earth, for the praise and glory of God and the fulfilment of the will of God, the One in whom the enemy had not one tiny point of contact, impervious to sin in all His holy perfection. Our hearts go out undoubtedly in worship to Him, and in thankfulness to Him.

So I read in Luke where the enemy attacks almost immediately after God announces His pleasure in His beloved Son. The enemy is there again ready to attack. Luke gives here the details of these temptations, then it says “the devil, having completed every temptation, departed from him for a time” (Luke 4: 13). “Having completed every temptation”. He had exhausted his armoury, that is what it means, he had used all his forces, he had marshalled his forces and used them all in an attempt to contaminate and bring down this holy One. But the strong man had been bound, Mark 3: 27. From that standpoint this holy and blessed One went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil. Oh the wonder of it! He bound the strong man, the only One who could do it, because He Himself was impervious to his wiles, “in him sin is not” (see 1 John 3: 5), He did no sin. Oh the glory of the perfect manhood of Jesus! The enemy tried his utmost, using all his ingenuity, all the wiles at his disposal. He had succeeded with every other man, but he found himself bound, and as bound the Lord Jesus went about and plundered his goods.

We are here tonight, I trust that we all believe; you young ones, I trust you have given your heart to Jesus. How simple the glad tidings are, just give your heart to Jesus, confess His Name, confess

your sins, confess that you are a sinner in the sight of a holy God, and put your trust in the precious blood of Jesus. The gospel is so simple. It does not require great human effort; it is available to the youngest, just to put your trust in Jesus.

He has bound the strong man and He has plundered his goods. Persons here are the evidence of that fact. It speaks elsewhere of David's spoil (see 1 Sam. 30:20); it is the result of the defeat of the enemy. It was not an easy matter – "he shall crush thy head, and thou shalt crush his heel", Gen 3: 15. I think we see that in the sufferings of Jesus. We see the fulfilment of that part of the prophecy "thou shalt crush his heel". It was not easy. The resolution, the settling, of the issue of good and evil, the question of sin and sins, was no easy matter. No one else could have done it. I ask you, I would almost challenge the universe, to produce a name from all the great men of history who could have met the great issue of good and evil, the question of sin and sins. The answer would need to reverberate through the universe – no one else could have done it, but the holy spotless Son of God.

If we look at the end of Luke it sets that out for us. It does not specifically, in Luke 24, mention the devil, but again I think he marshalled what he had and brought to bear on the holy soul of Jesus the awfulness of the moment that he faced. Some have said that Luke does not give us the forsaking; he does, when He says of the cup "this cup" (see Luke 22: 42). He is shrinking from it in His holy soul, because the cup meant the awfulness of the forsaking of a holy Man by a holy God. That is what the cup involves. The word says "Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me". My friends, it is no easy matter, the agony of soul in Gethsemane. I think someone said, He went through these sufferings anticipatively in the garden, actually on the cross. What it must have meant! Who else, I ask you again, could have endured this? "Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me". The anticipation of the awfulness of what He was going to suffer in reality, especially in these hours of abandonment – "forsaking", scripture says. I sometimes wonder why we use the word abandonment; Scripture says "forsaking" – "my God, my God

why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt 27: 46. The answer is "because thou art holy". As Mr Darby said the answer to that question was found in the heart of every repenting sinner. Has it been found in your heart? Have you wondered about the answer to that question, that holy cry, "My God, my God why has thou forsaken me? " I think someone said that the emphasis should be on "me". Mr Darby also said that He was betrayed, forsaken by His own, suffering from men, He turned to God, His only resource, and found Himself forsaken.

Oh the holy feelings of the Saviour! My friends, does it not attract you, does it not bow you before Him, all that He endured, all that He suffered? If you want to become morally strong, I would advise you to think tearfully and long and feed on the great matter of the sufferings of Christ.

Then it says "not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22: 42), a holy Man in perfect accord with the will of God. He accepted the cup as being the will of God, "not my will, but thine be done". And then heaven in sympathy with Him, "an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him". What a remarkable statement: I do not pretend to understand it. How He did it, I do not know. Scripture leaves it at that "an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him". Think of an angel doing that, the holy Saviour in suffering, and a mere creature, an angel, appearing from heaven and strengthening Him; that angel taking account feelingly and sympathetically of the sufferings of the Saviour.

Then it says "being in conflict he prayed more intently". Every prayer of the Lord would be perfect and intent, but we accept what Scripture says. I think, even in the conflict He was facing, the great issue of the solving of the moral question, the question of good and evil, the solving of the awful matter of sin and sins in the sight of the holy God, would involve also the enemy's attempt to get at Him, to make Him resist the will of God. I think the conflict would involve all these things. "His sweat became as great drops of blood falling down upon the earth". These were the anticipative sufferings, then on the cross, being made sin. Think of the awfulness of it, the thing that He hated most, the thing that he recoiled from, He was made

sin. Not made *to* sin, that is impossible, but made sin. The concentration of the immensity of sin, the human mind cannot take it in. He was made the very thing in the judgment of God, and on account of that was forsaken for three hours by a holy God in order that the whole matter should be settled for the glory of God. And it has been! The greatness of it! The triumphs of our mighty Saviour, victorious in the conflict. Not only did He die and satisfy the glory of God, satisfy the claims of the divine throne, but He provided a basis for God to come out in blessing to you and me. As the word says “whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood”, Rom 3: 25. God has provided, in His mercy, for every human being on the basis of repentance, the forgiveness of sins on account of the blood of Jesus, then His being raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.

In the Acts it speaks also of His enemies. There are many; we have spoken of one, we have spoken of the defeat of Satan. He is allowed scope at the present time, but the sentence has been passed, the work as far as God and for faith is concerned is complete. The devil is a vanquished foe. The Lord Jesus has also tackled the matter of death by going into it. It defeats human thinking, that by going into death, that very article, He has destroyed its power and annulled Him who had its might, so that the believer is set free in liberty by this glorious Man, this glorious Saviour. Think of this first preaching. As we read it I could almost hear Peter preaching. Let the whole house of Israel therefore know assuredly – no doubt about it. My friend, there is no doubt about the glad tidings. There is no doubt about the fact that God has made Him “this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2: 36), sitting there as Lord and Christ, victorious over the power of the enemy, victorious over the power of the grave, and having settled to God’s eternal satisfaction the question of sin and sins, and from that basis Peter says “Repent, and be baptised, each one of you”. To come into the benefit of the work of Christ repentance is needed and it is not repentance *en masse*. Peter says “Repent, and be baptised, *each one of you*”. You children, the faith of your parents will not

avail for you, repentance is an individual matter and leads to the gift of the Holy Spirit, so the believer is set up down here, in dignity and triumph. It is also a triumph for the Father that Christ's victory is complete and total and from that place on high has come the blessed Holy Spirit to fill the heart of the believer. He gives a resource which the world can never give and fills the heart and mind with a deep and permanent satisfaction that the world can never yield. May we all be in this and let our hearts go out to Him in thanksgiving and praise for the glory of God. For His Name's sake.

BUCKHURST HILL

1 January 1999