

A
WORD
IN ITS
SEASON

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Contents

THE TESTIMONY

'SERVICEABLE'

THE TESTIMONY

Revelation 1: 1-7; 3: 14; 19: 9-11; 1 Corinthians 1: 4-8

D.A.B. It is in mind to enquire together about some aspects of the testimony. It is a very big subject and it is not realistic here to try and look at all its aspects. I like to think of some of these big subjects as a cut stone or a crystal where certain aspects set off the light of the whole to the best advantage. We might seek to find those in this reading.

Before we go into the aspects that I had especially in mind I would like to divert for a moment to illustrate, from the story of Balaam in the wilderness, the value of choosing the point from which truth is viewed. We will remember that he was taken to positions at the extremity of the camp and viewed the people of God looking inwards. We sometimes take a view like that - we call it practical - but there are certain things that you do not see from that point of view. Balaam acknowledges that he did not see God. He says, "I shall see him, but not now", Num 24: 17. Nor did he see the tabernacle, although he saw the order in which the people were arranged around it. The idea of testimony is not connected so much with the camp as with the tabernacle. So we have the tables of the testimony, in the ark of the testimony, behind the veil of the testimony, in the tent of the testimony. We also have the show-bread and we have the lamp. The things that speak of testimony in that great system were at its centre where the presence of God was known. I do not think that you can work up from the view at the extremity of the camp to the standard which that sets; you have to start at the centre where the presence of God is known. I mention that by way of illustration. I did not intend to get occupied with the tabernacle system.

The three aspects that I thought we might look at are in these passages, although not one in each: they are spread across the passages we have read. The first is the great thought of the "faithful and true witness"; the second is a question about what we learn from the coming glory of the true character of the present testimony? The

third is another question about what John meant when he said he was "testifying the testimony": what did the speaker in chapter 19 mean when he referred to those who "have" the testimony; what does it mean for the testimony to be confirmed in us or among us?

I hope we might begin with some conversation together about the Lord Jesus personally without being occupied with ourselves, or even with the types. I do not want to say very much about it to start with, but wonder whether we might draw out from one another some impressions about the faithful and true witness.

I make one remark to set on the enquiry. I think it is in John's gospel that the faithful and true witness is especially portrayed. He says, "I have come for witness", and "I have come into the world that I might bear witness to the truth", John 18: 37. I notice also, in looking at how common that thought is in John's writings that the word that John uses for witness has come into English as 'martyr'. There is more to martyrdom than the way they died. We might say we are not called upon to die like the martyrs, but we are called upon to live like them. Balaam said he would like to die the death of the righteous (Num 23: 10), but he had no thought to live the life of the righteous. I believe that in the Lord Jesus and in His life here, as portrayed especially in John's gospel as the faithful and true witness, we see how those who are now in testimony are meant to live. Perhaps we can come to the other thoughts later: I wondered if we could first sustain some conversation about the Lord personally and draw out what there is among the brethren in appreciation of Him.

D.J.H. I like what you say as to John's gospel. I suppose we would see there what Paul says as to Him that, "he witnessed before Pontius Pilate the good confession", 1 Tim 6: 13. He speaks of the truth there so that Pilate says, "What is truth?", John 18: 38. It seems to be the peculiar witness in that gospel.

D.A.B. It is very much a witness that He bears alone. He does not trust Himself to man, He does not get others to do things for Him; it is what the Lord Jesus has done Himself. There is a unique character about the testimony of Jesus personally. The testimony in

the present time is of a slightly different character: the testimony of Jesus stands by itself. It is a testimony that relates especially to the Father and the revelation of His will. The Father has glorified Jesus for the testimony He rendered and, because of the testimony He rendered, God has now made Him the subject of the present testimony. I think that if we see that connection we would be drawn to enquire why it is that the Father found such delight in the life of Jesus here and in the testimony He rendered.

D.J.H. As you said, He was to bear witness to the truth and it has been said that the truth is the revelation of God. That was there in Jesus in all its perfection because of who He was, yet coming into expression in the blessed Man.

D.A.B. It was complete, and in a sense self-contained. It is very wonderful to take account of the way the life of Jesus is to be seen as a witness to all that God sought to be known.

E.C.B. In the verse which has been referred to, Jesus says, "I have been born for this, and for this I have come into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37), as if the truth has in mind the totality of what He came to express both in relation to God towards man, and man towards God.

D.A.B. That is what I was thinking. We do not have an account of the nativity in John's gospel, but he refers to His birth: even that is gathered up by His own testimony, so that the teaching in John's gospel as to the birth of Jesus is in the words of Jesus. He Himself speaks of His birth. It is not what others saw, but what He can speak of in relation to it.

E.C.B. What is said in John 18 is said to Pilate. In John 14 He says "I am the truth". What I am trying to get at is what is involved in the truth because that is the reality of the testimony, it is the truth.

D.A.B. The scripture says "the truth is in Jesus" - there is the idea that it is embodied in one Person, so that everything that God has sought to convey in the revelation of Himself and of His will can be taken account of in that one Person. One thing I like about John's gospel is that the testimony He renders is so much focused

on individuals. We were noticing the other day how Pilate is himself the focus of a very lengthy testimony by Jesus. The woman in John 4 is similarly, so is Nicodemus, and the man in John 5. They have a prolonged exposure to this testimony and in the course of that much is unfolded as to what God's desires are and what Jesus has come to secure. Jesus speaks to the woman at Sychar about the testimony. We have often said we might have thought that that was a bit premature, but He does it because that is what the testimony relates to, it relates to what God is seeking, and to His service and our availability for it.

E.O.P.M. Could you open up a little more the link you see between the testimony and witness?

D.A.B. In a sense I am thinking more about witness than testimony, if there is a distinction. We have here "the faithful and true witness", and what I see in that distinction, in so far as there is one, is that the eye is drawn by the idea of witness to the person. John speaks of the witness, which others have rendered, but Jesus is the Witness, just as He is the Word of God as we have in the passage in Revelation 19. There was a complete equivalence between what He was and what He said, as He says also (see John 8: 25). I would like, if possible, to draw out from the brethren what they see in Jesus and especially in the character of a witness. That is, what He was adorned and glorified everything He said.

D.J.H. You see that in the beginning of John, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us and we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father, full of grace and truth", John 1: 14. That really coloured the testimony; all that He said and all that He did, all His movements were governed by what could be seen there in that blessed relationship.

D.A.B. The Father took account of it as well. That is another question we might raise about the testimony, that is 'Who is it to?' My impression is that it is firstly to God, so that the Father says "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight", Matt 17: 5. There was something that the world had not been made privy to in

the life of Jesus. God kept it for Himself, and He keeps it for Himself still; we have no record of it. How profound the Father's delight must have been in every day, step and word that Jesus had.

D.J.H. I think that is an important aspect of the testimony, that primarily it is for God; it is what God can look down on at the present time and see what Paul refers to as the life of Jesus. Whether it be manifested in our body, that is in a vessel which is here, or whether it be on the mortal flesh in the condition in which we are, it is what God can take account of, although it has its bearing towards other men.

D.A.B. I hope we might see, a little later on, that the world, and indeed the universe, was created so that God might have something in it for His pleasure. He has had that in Jesus.

D.J.W. Does witness involve what we have seen? I was thinking "The Son can do nothing of himself save whatever he sees the Father doing: for whatever things he does, these things also the Son does in like manner", John 5: 19.

D.A.B. If I may say so reverently, nothing was lost in the telling. On the contrary, the telling amplified and was glorified by the One who was its witness. There was more in the testimony in the hands and in the words of Jesus than there could ever have been with a voice from the mountain. The same God was speaking but in a way that amplified, adorned and glorified the testimony of God.

D.J.W. You raised the question earlier as to how that comes down. I was thinking of the first few verses of John's epistle "that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes; that which we have contemplated and our hands handled" (1 John 1: 1), and then our fellowship is with the apostles. Is that the way it is continued?

D.A.B. The apostles provide a link between two distinct phases of testimony because they saw the one and had part in the other. I think there is something special about the apostles' witness that is complete, but it was formed by what they had seen in Jesus. That overlap enabled the present testimony to be set on in the same spirit and power.

E.C.B. It would be helpful if more could be said about the way in which the testimony is to God. It is not a side of things which is commonly spoken of amongst us. Generally we speak about what we are to our neighbours and at work, but it seems that an essential element of the testimony is what it is towards God and no doubt has in view, as the hymn says:

All thou hast e'er desired from man we see in Him.

What God desired to see in man was the testimony of Jesus.

D.A.B. Revelation 3 refers to "the beginning of the creation of God" and that raises the question, What was it all for? What is this great universe that man cannot compass, what was it made for? It was made so that in it there should be something that glorified God, and God was to be gratified by glory from that which He had made. We will see that the realisation of that in what is created is awaited, but as John brings out, Jesus has glorified God on the earth. How much that was appreciated by others is a secondary question, but God was glorified on the earth. That I believe is the consummation of testimony.

E.C.B. I think that is right. It is the difference between the first Adam and the last Adam. The last Adam is the testimony that God looked for in man, that He found in man here on earth in Jesus. It is easy to multiply references but "we speak that which we know, and we bear witness of what we have seen", John 3: 11. What Jesus is referring to there is what He must have seen in the purpose of God.

D.A.B. Adam was a figure of Him that is to come (see Rom 5: 14). What was coming was greater than what God set on in the creation of Adam. The fulfilment of what God set on in the creation will be when everything is headed up in the Christ, and that will be for the pleasure and glory of God. I trust this is not avoiding what is practical - we will come to what is practical - but I think we must see the level at which Jesus has set the idea of testimony. If we set our own level for it we will dishonour the idea of testimony that has been expressed in the life of Jesus.

D.E.R. Is not the testimony the setting forth at the present time of what will be displayed in its fulness in the time to come?

D.A.B. I hope we will see that a little later on. If we want to find out what the present testimony is, the account we have in Scripture of what is about to be manifested is the best indicator of what it should be. It would raise our view of it. In the life of Jesus here there was a very highly concentrated manifestation of what God is going to have in the coming glory and the world could not see it, but God could see it and some of His own were made privy to it. Sufficient light has now been given as to the life of Jesus for us to learn from it about what God intends testimony to be.

L.A.B. The assembly as answering to it is able to present God rightly and at the same time to yield glory to God. Is that not the answer to the perfect witness that there was in that blessed Man?

D.A.B. Yes, and it is perfect in the measure in which she is filled with that One. How much she admires Him! It was simply my desire that, in speaking over this matter, this Name, the faithful Witness, and drawing out what there is among the brethren about Him, our hearts might be stirred, so that when we come to think about what part we have in the testimony, we think about it with stirred hearts, and with some fresh impression about what Jesus has been.

L.A.B. It is the testimony of Jesus Christ; it is not the testimony of Christ Jesus. That is, it relates to the blessedness of all that came out in that blessed Man down here in this very world in which we find ourselves.

D.A.B. I keep on quoting Mr. A.J. Gardiner on that Name. He pointed out that there are many anti-christs but there is only one Christ. He said, 'Jesus Christ is the man whom God is pleased to distinguish'. He has distinguished Him by giving Him a place above, Jesus Christ the righteous is with the Father now; but He was here in testimony and God has been pleased to distinguish Him because of the way He distinguished God in testimony.

G.N. He is the effulgence of His glory and the expression of His substance (see Heb 1: 3). I wondered whether that would bear on

what you are bringing before us. Is the testimony continued in sonship at the present time?

D.A.B. I link those impressions very much with Paul's first meeting with Jesus - that is where he saw Him, in the glory. Those who knew Him here on earth have been referred to, and John was among them. John writes his gospel, and I believe all his writings are coloured by what he took account of. We live in a day when God has made the fullest disclosure of Himself. It would be sufficient to speak from the mountain, or to speak in creation. We were noticing the other day that even those who have heard His voice in creation are inexcusable, but He has spoken to us in the Person of the Son. He has spoken to us in Jesus. It is not simply that Jesus is revealed to be Someone in heaven, but He has actually been in the place where testimony has to be, and He has glorified God there.

J.S.G. Is there help in John 8 where Jesus is challenged as to His bearing witness and He links the thought of witness with "whence he came and whether he goes". Does that help in the enquiry as to the character of the faithful and true witness, as it was to the One from whom He came and to the One to whom He was about to go?

D.A.B. It is very fine to think of Him coming out freighted with all the blessed truth of God, and charged to make it attractive, and convicting and appealing. He returned whence He came and delivered a message, but He glorified the One whose message it was. He is received back into the glory that He left, having added to that glory in the pathway He took down here.

J.S.G. I wondered if the verses in John 8 perhaps suggest to us that there is not very much difference between the thought of witness and testimony because the Lord seems to use the words interchangeably there.

D.A.B. If a distinction is to be made, the idea of witness focuses our attention on the person rather than on the message. In the life of Jesus that distinction cannot be made because He says He is altogether that which he says, but let us contemplate the way He

moved, the grace of His pathway, "full of grace and truth", coming out from heaven to make God known in a way that He had never been known before and returning to the Father with that mission accomplished, and a testimony left here to that perfection.

V.E.W. In John 8, the Lord Jesus says "but I honour my Father, and ye dishonour me" (v 49) - the Man of John 8.

D.A.B. In other words He would not have anything taken away from the divine testimony. He says, "the reproaches of those that reproach thee have fallen on me", Ps 69: 9. He made Himself the butt of men's reproach, for the sake of the testimony of God. That is very wonderful!

V.E.W. You referred to John's gospel. Would you say more as to the opposition that the Lord Jesus had to face? Is it religious in its character more?

D.A.B. We might say a bit more about that when we speak about Laodicea. What we will see then is that the opposite of testimony is pretension. That is what the testimony of Jesus challenged and exposed in the Jews, their pretension. He says in John 8 "this did not Abraham" (v 40). He is the faithful and true witness, the One from whom pretension is absolutely absent.

J.W. As the faithful and true witness, do you think there was a suited humility about the Lord in His testimony. The latter part of John 5 shows that He did not come to glorify Himself, He came to glorify God, He did not speak from Himself, and He did not come in His own name. Does that link with what you are thinking of?

D.A.B. It does very much and John emphasises that side. He says "I have not come to seek my own glory", John 8: 50. Mr Darby said that the world has not seen the glory of Christ yet; if we speak about the personal coming of Christ, he says, it is future, because He came for the Father's glory and was here as a lowly bondman serving the will and glory of Another. That is the heart of testimony. We do not render testimony to ourselves. That is something I hope we will see.

E.C.B. It is a well known remark of Mr Raven's that what God is about to display He gives testimony to first, but what He is yet going to display has already been seen in Jesus here, has it not?

D.A.B. Yes. I had that remark very much in mind, that the coming glory sheds light on what the nature of the present testimony is, but there is a sense in which it has all been anticipated. Even the present testimony has been anticipated - indeed it must be so - in the life of Jesus here. There is a fulness and completeness about that which stands on its own.

E.C.B. It is remarkable that if, in relation to ourselves, you think of testimony, that the testimony that has been displayed in Jesus is God. What is going to be displayed when the whole of God's work is displayed in men must be some presentation of Himself.

D.A.B. What is being drawn attention to is important. We might have thought that there was room in the testimony of Jesus for something about Himself, but the way He presents Himself in John's gospel seems to rule that out, in order to concentrate the heart and the mind of the contemplator of Jesus. The person who contemplated His glory would see the Father.

J.W. I think that is very affecting. It is emphasised in John's gospel where you get the greatness of His Person, the One who is the I am, yet He is moving in such a lowly way.

D.A.B. In Revelation 19 He has a Name that no one knows but him that has it. That links with what you are saying, but He is the faithful and true. That relates to His witness.

P.J.W. The woman in chapter 4 says, "Come, see a man" (v 29), and the man in John 9 says "A man called Jesus" (v 11). That is what has been said, the greatness of His person coming out, and yet it is a Man.

D.A.B. Even some of the others I referred to say the same - the man in John 5 does and Pilate says, "behold the man". People who had failed to get the advantage of His witness nevertheless acknowledge what was there and what was embodied in Jesus.

R.W.F. Does the faithful and true witness encompass the idea of what had been made fully known earlier in John's gospel, "he hath declared him", in the context that "no one has seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him", John 1: 18? Nothing that could be held back has been held back, all has been made known. I wondered if it is affecting to us to understand that that is so and it is not to be limited by our understanding of it.

D.A.B. It is very important to see that essential element of witness, that it is complete. We might not have thought so except that Jesus is the model of witness. What God seeks in witness He has found in Jesus and He is not settling for anything less in the present time. We look round upon one another and say there are not very many of us, there used to be more, and so on; we see a few gaps. Brethren pass on; as we say, meetings close. We might start thinking, it is getting a bit patchy, but witness is complete. If our understanding of testimony is governed by that kind of circumstance, we have not a proper understanding of what testimony is. If we want to be recovered to a proper understanding of it, we look at Jesus.

E.F.W. John in his writing, at the outset of his gospel, speaks of John the Baptist standing and seeing Jesus as He walked. What impressions he must have had of the walk of that Man! It is not what He said there, but how He walked, that was different from every other. That is right at the outset of His gospel. I thought what has been said about other chapters in John's gospel really had a wonderful start in that there was a Man walking here on earth and there was no comparison to such a Man. Then later, that Man is One with whom two went to see where He dwelt, and then we get all that He said. All that is part of the witness, but it began with what they saw. John the Baptist stood as though this was a tremendous sight to behold.

D.A.B. The Lord did not come and station Himself somewhere for people to make pilgrimages to and walk round, like some kind of effigy or anything of that sort. He was actually treading this earth,

He was living actually in the place of testimony and so accessible. I find it hard to picture Him walking away from them, but bringing the testimony of God towards them. They did not have to run after Him; it seems almost as if they had an encounter with Him.

E.F.W. The day before John the Baptist said that, He was coming to him. This is the next day and he was drawing attention to the walk of that blessed Man.

D.A.B. It is characteristic of Jesus, He says, "I come quickly", Rev 3: 11. That is a character of Jesus and it brings the witness of God right where we are.

E.C. Have you any thought to say something about faithfulness? "The faithful and true witness", because the Lord was faithful and your exercise is that we should be the same.

D.A.B. It is interesting that He has that Name. He is called Faithful and True. It links with what has been drawn attention to in John 18 that the Lord came for a purpose, "I have come into the world, that I might bear witness of the truth". If you or I gave a witness people might say, How much has he told us, has he told us everything? What does he manage to convey? Has he managed to convey just the fact, or has he managed to add something of the glory and the atmosphere of the place from which he has come? The Lord Jesus has undertaken to do all that and more. At the end of His course here He can say, "I have finished the work that thou gavest me that I should do it", John 17: 4. The course of things has not been changed, there has not been any variation or any shortfall, He can come to the end on the day appointed and say the He had finished it.

D.J.H. Would His faithfulness involve that whatever the circumstances in which He found Himself - and they were very varied - the testimony remained and it was true all the way? He was unchanged in relation to it.

D.A.B. Yes, and His testimony was not reactive, it was not determined by the circumstances. It was perfectly suited to the circumstance but pre-ordained to be so. It was not that the

testimony was moulding itself round the circumstances, but the circumstances came to meet the testimony and the testimony was ready for every vicissitude through which it passed.

D.J.W. Is that encouragement for us? You referred earlier to admirers. So the testimony is not exactly an effort, it is just what you are living, it is just what you are come out.

D.A.B. The only One in whom perfect testimony has been seen is the One who did it that way.

D.J.W. It does work out. I was affected by the words we had at Mr Meek's burial. It was not what he had said; it was what the man was that was referred to. That really is the testimony, what the man was enjoying, what he was.

D.A.B. I was touched by noticing in the concordance that John's word for witness is our word for martyr. I thought about Balaam. He says, 'I would like to die the death of the righteous, I would like to have a death like that, let my end be like that' (see Num 23: 10). But what about his beginning, what about the middle, how was that going to be? Was he going to seek enchantments, or was he going to be a witness?

J.W. Was it another feature of His faithfulness in witness that He would hold nothing back, knowing that it would bring Him into suffering? I was thinking of your reference to 'martyr'.

D.A.B. That links with what has been asked about, that the adverse consequences of saying things never weighed.

E.C.B. Later in Revelation it will say, "His name is faithful and true". Does not what is being said underline that testimony is an absolute notion, it is not a relative notion?

D.A.B. That is why I thought we had to begin with Jesus. We could start with ourselves and talk about how far we are in the good of these things, but in the good of what? We had to start with the divine standard. It is not an abstract standard, but for three and a half years it has actually been seen here in adverse circumstances.

D.J.R. If the testimony, as you say, as to God has been seen perfectly and completely in Christ, then why is there this dispensation?

D.A.B. We will come on to that.

D.E.B. I was going to enquire whether the two further descriptions of the Lord in verse 5 are relevant to what we are saying, "the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth". That all enters into the testimony. As He has been into death and come out of it, the first-born is suggestive of what will soon be manifested in its fulness in the many who are raised from the dead. But then He has this title too, "the prince of the kings of the earth". Whatever majesty and glory you can think of in relation to things seen here relative to man, He is superior to all that, is He not?

D.A.B. I think both these names convey the idea of God's selection. This is the kind of Man, this is the Man whom God is pleased to distinguish. He has distinguished Him in raising "Him from among the dead and giving Him glory, that our faith and hope should be in God", 1 Peter 1: 21. God has made that choice.

B.H.C. In regard to the thought of faithfulness, the Lord was here in relation to the Father. In John 1 it says "with a father", "we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father" (v 14). I was thinking of how it says Abraham and Isaac went both of them together, then in John 17 the Lord could say, "I am not of the world" His testimony was in relation to a heavenly order of things.

D.A.B. If we can go on from that I would like to bring out that the faithfulness of testimony is a matter of proximity. It is a question of how near we are. Reference has already been made to the remark well known among us that God will have in testimony what He is about to display in glory. I understand that to be the meaning of the word in chapter 19 that "the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus". The reference to Him as "the beginning" raises the question, What was it all made for? In Psalm 19 the psalmist says, "The

heavens declares the glory of God" (v 1). That is what they were for, and then "In them hath he set a tent for the sun" (v 4); that is they provide a back-drop for the glory of Christ. Then when we think of the earth, God made it to be inhabited, He made to be occupied by people who were to be God's image and glory, according to 1 Corinthians 11 verse 7. In the present time, "all come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3: 23), so that in man after the flesh there is not a true testimony, but as we have been remarking there has been a true testimony in Jesus. He says "I have glorified thee on the earth", John 17: 4. God has answered that testimony by exalting the Lord Jesus and by appointing a day in which He will come in His own glory. The Father will lend His glory and the angels will lend their glory, but He will come in His own glory. The wonderful thing about that is that we shall come with Him. As Paul says in Colossians 3, "your life is hid with the Christ in God. When he is manifested who is our life, then shall we be manifested with him in glory" (v 4).

Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1 that "he shall have come to be glorified in his saints, and wondered at in all those who have believed in that day" (v 10). This scripture says that these things will shortly take place; it says "the time is near". In the time it would take any of us here to blink, they will become an actuality. Now if that is the case, I say to myself, should the light and glory of those things not shine in present testimony?

D.J.H. I would like to know more as to what is in your mind as to being near. I was thinking of our nearness to the One who has been the faithful and true witness. You referred to His walk earlier and John says "he that says he abides in him" - you could not be nearer than that - "ought, even as He walked, himself also ought so to walk", 1 John 2: 6. I wondered as to our nearness to the faithful and true witness, whether you had that in mind at all that it would result witness of that character, the testimony of that kind coming into expression in us.

D.A.B. From the public point of view - not from the secret point of view - the rapture and the appearing are presented as the same thing. If that is so it means that the glory that is about to be revealed

is just the other side of the twinkling of an eye. That is how near we are to seeing the glory of Jesus. I do not know if we all feel as near as that - nearness has been spoken of. I ask myself, Do I? You could tell if I did from my testimony. That is what I had in mind.

P.J.W. Paul speaks about the life of Jesus being manifested in His mortal flesh. Would that bear on what you are saying?

D.A.B. He refers to an earthen vessel but with light shining through it. People have linked that with Gideon, but Paul does not speak about broken vessels. It is remarkable that the light shines through an earthen pot and not just a dim glow. What should be shining through is the radiancy of what is so near, a glory that this world is hardly fit to see.

E.C.B. The hindrance to that in the chapter which has been referred to is the god of this world.

D.A.B. Dare I say simply, he is our problem, because he eclipses our testimony to the glory of Christ. The more we feel beholden to him, the less the glory of Christ will be manifested. But, as we have seen, the testimony of Jesus was not like that. He says, "the ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing", John 14:30. Dare I say to myself and to my beloved brethren, if he had less in me, would the glory of Christ, which the world is about to see in all its brilliance, show a little more brightly? And should it not? Is that a question?

E.C.B. Yes it is, and it raises the question as to the quality of the preaching of the gospel among us. According to that chapter the glad tidings is of the glory of the Christ and it is intended to bring about a reflex of that in men.

D.A.B. Exactly. "The radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine forth for them", 2 Cor. 4:4. What a thing to be denied by the god of this world. What a treasure to be robbed of!

E.C.B. What a treasure for the world to be robbed of too.

D.A.B. Going back to what we have said, what a treasure for God to be robbed of. Think of what He had in Jesus here on earth, a humble lowly Man, and now what He has in testimony relates to that Man glorified. It is in earthen vessels, it is in people in difficult circumstances, and there are a lot of problems to overcome, but the testimony they carry is to that Man glorified.

P.J.W. Paul also speaks of the dying or putting to death of Jesus - bearing about in his body the dying of Jesus. That is the test.

D.A.B. What is the answer to the test?

P.J.W. The man that never pleased God has to be put to death in me, do you think?

D.A.B. Absolutely. Can we turn from allowing the god of this world to eclipse the glory of Christ; can we so fill our hearts with that glory that the god of this world will appear eclipsed. We referred the other day to the world's glory growing strangely dim. It is quite bright for most of us. The glory of Christ is much brighter if only we would let it shine.

L.A.B. That involves our giving greater room to the Spirit of God, because He is the One who has come to glorify Christ. These things cannot be worked up to by us. The only way, and the secret of it, is giving greater room and place to the Spirit of God.

D.A.B. We have to come to that, that however well-intentioned we are, however much we might be ready to acknowledge the faults of the first man, Adam will not glorify Christ. The Lord Jesus says as to the Spirit, "He shall glorify me". Is that what you are thinking?

L.A.B. Yes, and "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John 4:4.

D.A.B. So there ought to be a brighter light.

L.A.B. I agree there ought to be, but we need to lay hold of the truth. I have often thought that the enemy constantly tries to eclipse in our minds the reality of a Man the other side of death, and the power and presence of the Spirit here.

D.A.B. I wish I could hold myself up as a shining example, but all I can point the brethren to is where to begin. I am sure you are right that there is One greater in us, and it is not just that He is more powerful, and able to check Satan as we might feel we would like Him to, but He has a brighter light. It is the light of a coming glory in which the glory of this world will appear dark. These things are so near, you could blink and they might be there. If we believe that, if we keep saying that, why does it not come out more in our testimony?

D.H. It mentions the Amen in verse 14 of chapter 3 and also 8 of the first chapter, the Alpha and Omega. In 2 Corinthians 1 it says "For whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen, for glory to God by us" (v 20).

D.A.B. I was going to say something about the Amen right at the end - that is where Amens come. There is a difference between the Omega and the Amen. The Omega is the Lord having the last word, and He is entitled to that, but the Amen is affirmative. If we look at the life of Jesus, He is His own Amen. Who else could say Amen to the testimony of Jesus? He says "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do that I should do it". On the cross He says, "It is finished"; in Revelation He says "It is done". But the blessed thing is that He is the Amen to the present testimony as well. The day of display, when He comes to be glorified in His saints, is the Amen to the present testimony. In a coming day the One who has glorified God on the earth is going to glorify everybody, great or small, who has had a part in the present testimony. I think that is very wonderful! What a promise to a company that was being unfaithful!

G.N. The operation of the Spirit will result in what is transparent. I was wondering whether that should be apparent amongst us at the present time, amongst all believers. Maybe Satan would allow things that perhaps would not contribute to transparency. That is my concern.

D.A.B. We do not want transparency just so that we can see the faults of one another. We do not want a loss of privacy that makes things public that are better not public, but if the transparency yielded more of the appreciation of Christ, if it made the light shine brighter, if what I know is among the brethren came out more freely and fully, yes, let us have transparency for that.

G.N. Satan works in many ways. Paul, as we well know, had to refuse the help of Satan in the woman with the spirit of Python, and we have to be very careful because Satan will operate very subtly. I was just thinking of the Spirit's work, the result of it is transparent.

D.A.B. Satan has his own interests in transparency; we have only to read the newspaper to see what Satan would like to be transparent. We live in a prurient age in which the most evil things are freely spoken about, and it is thought to be a good thing. What Satan is not interested in is the glory of Christ, and he brings forward all his filth to set aside and to becloud and eclipse the present testimony. Let us not have anything to do with it. Let us be more bent, as Jesus was, to see that the glory of the One to whom we render testimony is what really comes out in our lives.

R.M.B. Why does the Lord present Himself as the Amen to Laodicea?

D.A.B. The Lord sends this letter to the seven churches. The seven churches are neighbours to one another and the letters are given in the order in which a messenger going to them all would travel. The Lord starts with the one that is nearest to Patmos and the only one that is on the sea. So a messenger from Patmos would go across to Ephesus and then around the others, and he would come last to Laodicea. Bearing that in mind, it is interesting that He says, I am coming, to the first six churches, but to Laodicea, He has come already. He says "I stand at the door". We might say He has only got as far as the first one, but He has actually got as far as the last one. A lot has entered in to what He has had to say about the others but He presents Himself as the security of the whole testimony. Whatever unfaithfulness has come in, not just at

Laodicea, the triumph, the successful outcome of the testimony, is assured, and it is assured by Him, not by us.

R.M.B. I think what you say is helpful. I was also helped by some remarks of Mr Darby in which he says that God asserted certain things as to the church, its heavenly place, and heavenly blessings, but the church in its Laodicean condition completely failed to put its Amen to that. In Jesus, by contrast, everything for which God looked to Him He has greatly affirmed in His own blessed person.

D.A.B. We must speak simply - we have failed too and if the testimony had been entrusted to us it would be in ruins. Mr Darby said that, if we are a testimony to anything, we are a testimony to the ruin. Mr Raven said, rightly, What use is that? But the testimony is not in ruins because although we have part in it, it remains in the custody of the Spirit. It is not a testimony about us, it is a testimony about Jesus. A testimony about Jesus cannot be allowed to fail and God will ensure that it does not. That is a great comfort. It does not let us off, but it is a great comfort, it is a point of recovery. We have something to come back to. If the testimony was drifting as we have drifted in the past, how would we ever recover? But there is something to come back to.

D.J.H. We need understanding as to the house of God, as referred to in 1 Timothy, which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. That remains. We speak much of a great house, the simile that is used in the second epistle, but we need to see that there is something to come back to, something which is here by virtue of the presence and faithfulness of the Holy Spirit.

D.A.B. Mr Darby said also that to get the idea that we are the testimony and to become occupied with ourselves is corrupting. It actually leads to corruption, and then he goes on to remark in relation to Moses that a shining face never saw itself. That is what I am trying to stimulate the brethren about, that we might have faces that shine because they are occupied with the glory of Christ.

E.C.B. In regard to what has been asked about, it is perhaps to be noted that the One who is the Amen and the faithful and true witness is the One who stands at the door and knocks. Things are never without hope.

D.A.B. Perhaps I could tell a little story about Laodicea. I think the Lord is very gracious the way He comes to them. Laodicea was a place that had grown rich from banking and its commodity trade was in black cloth and eye-salve. You can see that the Lord presents Himself here almost like a travelling salesman; he stands at the door with things to sell. They would not be interested in free gifts - when Laodicea was destroyed once by an earthquake they refused charity, but He offers to sell them things, things they might be interested in buying. Before He talks to them about the things they might buy, He talks to them about their water. Laodicea is a remarkable place; it has hot and cold springs. We know that hot and cold water are perfectly useful in their own place: the Lord says "I would thou wert cold or hot". But the hot water was some way away from the place and instead of going to its source, they let it run into the town in a channel so that by the time it arrived it was cold. The Lord says, that is horrible, I cannot savour that kind of spirit. They had left their first love, they had stopped admiring Jesus, they had stopped going to the source where vitality could be maintained, they had allowed indifference and especially they had allowed pretension. The Lord says He was going to spew them out of His mouth, not because they would not answer the door, but because they said they had grown rich and needed nothing. We might say that falling numbers are an antidote to pretension, but they are not, because we pretend to make up for what we have not got outwardly. Pretension is the absolute antithesis of testimony. The Lord could put all that right: He stands at the door. Would anyone open the door to the Man for whom the whole universe was created, the One who has been a faithful and true witness, the One who is going to see everything through? Would anyone open the door and let Him in? It is very fine that He promises everything to the overcomer. There is nothing taken away, there is no consolation prize here, He promises Him everything. "I

will give to him to sit with me in my throne." What a thing! He promises Laodicea what He has always intended that the people of God should have. I believe He is making an urgent and a very immediate appeal to their affections as I think He would to ours.

G.C.B. He speaks in verse 20 as to the individual. Do you think that if we are exercised to open the door there will be advantage and gain for the saints locally and elsewhere?

D.A.B. That is very simply why I read the verse in Corinthians because it refers to the testimony of the Christ confirmed in them, or as I understand that might mean 'among' them. Paul is able to identify that certain households were in the good of this. There is another aspect of testimony to one another, but it must start with individuals. If only we could draw one another into this more, so that what is true of the brightest might become true of us all!

G.C.B. I think we should have the faith for that. As we are sitting down with one another we should have the faith, the Lord being present, that there is advantage for the whole company.

D.A.B. I think the Lord has the faith for it. This knock at the door was not a hopeless quest; there was a real prospect that someone would answer. "To him that overcomes" - who was that? It does not say, if anyone overcomes, but "to him that overcomes". It was not a lost cause the Lord was on.

R.W.F. "I with him and he with me" conveys, among other things, that the Lord wished to have a conversation with them. This is a conversational meeting. The opportunity is now.

D.A.B. It reminds me again of John's gospel. There are two very beautiful touches as the Lord prepares to leave His own. One is "you will see me again", and then He says, "I will see you again". I think that is what the Lord is thinking about here. That is how much He loves the company of His own, that is how much He wants to share these things with us.

L.A.B. Is it interesting therefore that He does not say, If anybody hears my knock: He says, 'If anybody hears my voice'. I thought it

stressed the intimacy that the Lord desires to have with His own. He will knock, but what He really desires is that we might hear His voice. To hear somebody's voice you generally have to be fairly near.

D.A.B. He does not just say, if you hear my word, either. All His feelings are in His voice, all His desires, all His longings, all His aspirations for His own are in His voice. The sheep hear His voice. He is able to convey something of what He is about to lead them into in the way He says things.

J.W. Hearing His voice would be the recognition of the Person. He is outside here. That would come home to one who heard His voice.

D.A.B. It cannot be anybody else. That was partly what was in my mind in starting with the faithful and true witness, that we might have this conversation secure in some fresh apprehension of who this Person is. We do not mistake Him for somebody else. He says the sheep do not hear the voice of strangers, they have an ear for One.

L.A.B. That involves the effect in an occasion like this.

D.A.B. I believe that is what occasions like this are for, that we might become accustomed to His voice.

D.E.B. Do you have any thought as to the reference in 1 Corinthians to the testimony being confirmed to you (see 1 Cor 1: 6)?

D.A.B. There are a number of references in what we have read. John says that he "testified the testimony of Jesus", which I think is being in the good of what he was enjoying, and then in chapter 19 we have those who have the testimony - not just that they profess it or acknowledge that it is true, but it is something that characterises them; and then in Corinthians that it was confirmed. Paul has especially in mind what might be found in the Christian circle. There is a reinforcing effect of being among the brethren. In a conversation like this we can talk about these things together and, by discovering the convictions that different ones have about them, and drawing out

from one another what they have, we become established in the truth of these things.

D.J.H. Is it important that it follows "awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ"? That is that the display of what is here in testimony is before those in whom the testimony is confirmed. It is something that you have been bringing before us in the course of this time, that what is to be displayed is here in testimony. It seems as though the power for it is what we are waiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. It speaks elsewhere of the coming glory and the sufferings of the present time, which the testimony might involve, that they are not worthy to be compared with the glory about to be revealed (see Rom 8: 18). It is important that that should be before us.

D.A.B. The present testimony is to the coming glory of Christ and the glorifying of His saints with Him in that day. The world has no idea that this is about to happen. They look at believers, but they have no idea that we are about to be glorified with Jesus. In the Christian circle we know that it is true, and therefore these things should be confirmed among us. We should have some sense in our gatherings together that we anticipate what is about to be our experience.

D.J.H. I think we would talk about it a bit more. I say that to my own shame.

D.A.B. And I to mine. It has just come home to me as I have thought about this. The children can try this: blink - it does not take long, and in that space of time, these things will be a present reality. How opaque is the earthen vessel that these things do not show in present testimony.

R.W.F. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the world to come of which we speak. Presumably we know something about it if we speak about it, otherwise it is what you were just saying earlier, presumption.

D.A.B. We do not just speak about it in a speculative kind of way. People wonder what they are going to find when they go to

heaven but we speak about something that is confirmed among us.

H.A.H. "Confirmed in you", would that be first of all in Paul himself and then in those he can draw attention to like the house of Chloe and Stephanus and others, do you think?

D.A.B. I am not sure that Paul is exactly limiting this here. It is very instructive the line he is on here. There were all kinds of problems in Corinth, but he does not take Balaam's view of them. He does not stand at the extremity of the camp where he can look into all the tents and see the problems. He stands outside the tent of meeting and says, this is how it ought to be. In God's view it is so. God has not seen iniquity in Jacob: that is these verses in Corinthians - "how goodly are thy tents ... like aloes which Jehovah hath planted; like cedars beside the water" Num 24: 5,6. That is how Paul takes account of the Corinthians. We are in mixed conditions, but it is that side we should be cultivating.

H.A.H. It is all those features that you drew attention to that are really inside the tent of testimony that you referred to at the beginning of the reading.

D.A.B. It is much more challenging to our state than to look at what we think is wrong from the extremity of the camp. If you stand outside the tabernacle, it will correct your vision in a way that walking around the extremity of the camp like Balaam never will.

D.E.R. "Confirmed in you" suggests that the testimony was substantial in them. Their lifestyle was such that it manifested the testimony of Jesus.

D.A.B. That is extremely practical. We are all tested as we go outside. We are all tested by the glory of the world as we see it, but surely starting here, what you are speaking of, that lifestyle, could be cultivated among us, and as we work on it with one another so it will become easier for us as we face adversity carrying the savour and the brightness of it with us.

E.C.B. Chapter 12 implies that the working of the body locally is a sign that the testimony of the Christ has been formed, "so also is

the Christ".

D.A.B. It is substantial. It is what Paul says to the Colossians, "the body is of Christ". What is substantial has that character. There is lots of it here in this company and we ought to be able to work on one another to set it free.

London

18 March 2000

Key to Initials

(London unless shown)

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'SERVICEABLE'

Andrew Burr

2 Timothy 2: 21; Exodus 3: 21-22; 35: 4-10, 20-22 (to "willing heart"); 36: 2-5; Numbers 4: 4-15 (to "to carry it")

I long, beloved brethren, to be able to convey to every one that they really count, and that they have been called into something in which they have a valued part. I suppose from experience in different aspects of our lives that we all know something of the feeling of being unwanted. There is nothing like the discomfort of feeling that you have just been involved in something to make up the numbers, or that if someone else had been available you would not have been included at all. We are engaged here with a circle in which there are no extras, in which everybody counts. It may not be that everyone is yet filling out the part that is theirs, but that does not diminish your value. I do not aim what I am saying entirely at the young. It is not so long ago that I felt that ministry aimed at the young was aimed at me, and I have to confess that I used to find it rather patronising. But, beloved young brethren, you really do count.

I do not just say that you count to the rest of us, but you count to the Lord; He is counting on you. He has a place in His great plan that only you can fill. If you were not here, this company would be diminished, not just in numbers, but by your absence. If you were to discover with the Lord what your place in the company is and fill it out, the whole company would be enriched, and the faith of those who have gone before would be answered.

I read the passage in Timothy just to draw on the thought of being serviceable to the Master. There is not another Master like Him. You could not find a Master who is anything like Him, and He has chosen you to have a part in His service. If you will submit to His instruction you will become serviceable. You will be able to fill the part that the Lord has assigned to you, without any sense of inadequacy. What a prospect, what an honour, what a privilege! You say, you are already speaking about things that I do not feel up to. He will make you up to them. He has not chosen you by

mistake, you are certainly not His second choice. You were chosen in Christ before the world's foundation, not because you have a place in heaven only, but because there is a place for you to fill now. The Lord is looking that you might fill it out.

I read about the history of Israel in the wilderness, their exodus from Egypt. It is of interest that this spoiling of the Egyptians is referred to three times. It must be important. The Bible does not repeat a lot of things; there are some things it only says once. There are some things that people hang their faith upon, and they only appear in the Bible once. So, if something appears more than once, it must be important. This idea appears three times in these chapters in Exodus. What is of added interest is that it is not an after-thought with God. He does not say, 'By the way, take a few things as you come out', but when God first set out His scheme to bring His people out of Egypt, He disclosed this plan that they should bring the gold and silver vessels and clothing, with them.

I believe it would be right to say that God saw the children of Israel as gold and silver vessels, or as we have here "utensils"; that is He saw them as having a use. The word is used for other things, the King James Version calls them jewels, but they might have been instruments, tools. The children would know that if they were looking in their home for utensils the place to look is in the kitchen. You will find a drawer there full of things that help you do things. They are not like tools that you have to learn how to use; they are things that come ready to hand to do simple jobs better. You are not being called to anything complicated, but the Lord has need of you. He sees you as a gold and silver vessel, or utensil. You might say, what are these things doing in Egypt? You might as well ask, What are the people doing in Egypt? That is where they were, that is where God took them up, and that is where God has taken every one of us up. Most of us know something about being bondmen in Egypt. The world in which we live is becoming increasingly brazenly a place where nobody is truly valued. There are countries where life is cheap, but I do not just mean countries where life is cheap; even in this country people are no longer really valued. Where, a right-minded

person might say, did the idea of redundancy come from? We are not talking about old machines but people, skilled and experienced people made redundant, discarded for short term opportunist reasons to gratify the demands of other people for money. They say, 'We can always get somebody else; if things pick up we can always get somebody else'. You see that people are not valued - it is the spirit of Egypt.

If we look back in history, we see the way that 'working people' have been treated; what a comment it is upon man's honour of God. Think of the children working in the mines, the boys sent up chimneys, think of the hours that people worked, the hours that children still work - robbed of their sight before they are even ten. I suppose it would be right to say that God allowed trades unions to counter this attitude to people's fellows. The trades unions put their trust in the power of combinations instead of in the power of God, and they became a scourge in their right. But look what has happened now that trades unions have been weakened. We used to pray for the weakening of trades unions, and it has come to pass, but now Egypt's oppression returns in areas where it was not previously felt as it is now. People claim the body and soul of those who work for them, they take it for granted that their waking moments are all theirs, they disregard the claim that God has over His people. It is not because they value people; they do not. Egypt is full of gold and silver vessels, the value of which is recognised only by God.

I notice that later on when they start preparing to leave Moses says, "speak now in the ears of the people that they ask every man of his neighbour and every woman of her neighbour utensils of silver and utensils of gold". The time has come and God is going to make His claim for what is of value. He demands that Egypt relinquishes its claim on that which He has appointed for His own service. It may sound a bit impractical to say so, but that is the day we are in; Moses says "speak now". We must answer to the claim of the One to whom we really are worth something. God is redeeming things out of

Egypt because they are of value to Himself and because they have a place in His great scheme of things.

Do you hear the call? Do you hear God's call? There are wonderful things in the call. I want to speak about three of them. The first is that it points to a way of escape from a world that is under divine judgment. Think of the awful judgment that is about to fall on Egypt. Have you noticed that God did not tell Egypt exactly when it was going to happen? It could happen at any time. The world is under judgment; the people of God are called upon to escape from divine judgment. There is only one way. The way is out through a door that has blood upon it. Think of that! We have been bought with a price! We can hardly speak of God's valuation, but it was at any rate a price that He was ready to pay. What He has bought with it must be of considerable value to Himself. Think of that! When you give thanks that the blood of Jesus was shed for you, consider what it has to tell you about your value to God.

The second point I want to make is that the way of escape is not just a way of escape from a world under judgment, but it is a way that provides a complete answer to your own guilt. The people of God were not brought out of Egypt because they were morally different from the Egyptians. We see that in the wilderness, and in any case Egyptians came out with them. Their guilt was met in the way that God delivered them, again by precious blood - "we have been redeemed", Peter says, "not by corruptible things ... but by precious blood" 1 Peter 1: 17,18).

The third thing I want to speak about a little more is that there is a call to service. God is calling you, not just so that you can escape, not simply so that you might be justified, but He is calling you that you might be serviceable. That is why I read the other passages.

Before I come to those passages I just want to say a little word on one side about the clothing, because I have often wondered why it was that God told them to bring clothing. The people were not ready for a journey in some ways but God is wonderfully practical.

We have sung about life's storms; God is ready for every one of them. He is going to see that you will be fully provided for if you answer to the call. I cannot tell you what tests you will meet; God knows them all. You may take it as a promise from God that He will be ready when you reach every one of them. His resource will see you through if you draw upon it. They took these clothes. I imagine that they also did not grow old. Forty years later they had the clothes in which they had come out of Egypt, they had the clothes for which they had spoiled the Egyptians. Right to the end of their course they still had God's provision for them, serviceable provision for them. I just want to say a practical word, because some of our aged brethren have been brought up in a very pious way. They have been brought up to understand that the believer is not to depend upon the world. They have put their trust in God and God has looked after them, and some of them have reached a very advanced age. The time comes when some of them are not able, any more, to look after themselves. Nowadays provision is offered for people in that position, and aged brethren, with what they have learned, hesitate to accept it. Beloved, accept it from God! If it is the world's, God has spoiled the world. There was never any suggestion that Israel should feel guilty for bringing these things out of Egypt. God brought them out of Egypt and Israel travelled through the wilderness with provision that God had made for them right to the end of the journey. If you come to the end of the journey and find you need provision that you never expected to need, take it from God. Beloved young brethren, learn from that: there is not anyone who has put their trust in God who has found themselves short. There was an old brother who lived not far from here who used to quote the Psalm, "I have been young, and now am old, and I have not seen the righteous forsaken" (Ps 37: 25) - nor has anybody else.

I come to the passage in the middle of Exodus because here we see the use that God had in mind for these utensils. You say, they had come out of Egypt: was God making His tabernacle out of Egyptian things? The people had come out of Egypt, and in God's eyes the people and these utensils were pretty much the same thing.

They were things He had redeemed, things that were His and His to use. Now there is another aspect of the call. This is not so much in the way of a commandment or an injunction like the call for repentance is, or the injunction to escape from Egypt, but this is an appeal for our affections. God does not say everyone has got to do this; He says "everyone whose heart is willing, let him bring it". That is the other side of recognising your worth in the sight of God. If you understand that you mean something to God, when God asks you to give yourself, give, and give willingly. Give what God calls for readily. You forgo a blessing if you do not. God is ready to answer richly those who have willing hearts and prompted spirits. Think of them, all these men and women! What they brought with them was far too much. The tabernacle in the wilderness is a wonderful type that you could speak about for hours, but even such a wonderful picture is not great enough to capture the greatness of those thoughts of God in which you are included. You are assigned a part in something that is even greater than this. I would say it is orders of magnitude greater than this. The system into which we have been called, in God's grace, will never be over-topped by willing spirits and willing hearts. Think of that, a great monument to the willingness of God's people! Would you aspire to have a part in a monument like that if one was being constructed? People make monuments to those who have died and they are not perhaps so concerned about the way they live, but what if a monument was erected to the willing spirit? Imagine it! Would you like to subscribe to a living monument to the willing spirit? If you really count, do not hold anything back. This is where your fulfilment lies. This is where your hopes, your expectations can be realised. Give what you have, what you are, to this, as one for whom God has paid to redeem from Egypt and bring to Himself. Perhaps your job claims so much of your energies - yes, it claims quite a lot of mine too - but beloved, it does not deserve them like this. Here is something where there will be a perpetuated testimony to the value that you are in the sight of God. Some of these things came out of Egypt. Why do you think it was that God told them to bring them out of Egypt? It was because He wanted them in His service.

So, you hear the gospel preached, and you feel perhaps the preacher is speaking to you: get some sense of God's desires, His longing about that special place reserved for you. Fill it out with a willing spirit. I may not be gifted, there are lots of things I cannot do, but I cannot imagine that there could be anyone who was unable to be willing. That is the qualification here. Some of them were very skilled craftsmen. Think of the person who made the lamp stand. It was not poured into a mould; you cannot imagine Jesus in a mould, can you? They took a talent of gold and fashioned out of it a lamp stand with seven branches to it and ornamented with almonds and these other things. Imagine that, beaten out of a block of a talent of gold. Think of the skill. You say, I have not got that sort of skill; no, but God is setting a very simple pre-qualification for part in this service - willingness.

We could all be willing. Is there anyone whose spirit could not be moved by the greatness of what God has in His heart for every one of us. "Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard ... which God has prepared for them that love him" 1 Cor 2: 9. The things are not just there to be taken. God is not just dispensing, He is also calling, and one of the things that He has prepared is a place which your willing spirit has to fill.

I come on to Numbers because there is another thought here. The ark and the tabernacle system is being prepared to move. There are different ways of applying this - we speak of the testimony moving, but we can boil all this teaching down to apply to every one of us. We all move through the world, through the wilderness, and the question arises, How do we do it? What is the manner? What is our life-style?

I wanted to draw attention to these cloths. When the quantities for the tabernacle system are enumerated and when the various things are made and brought together there is no reference to these cloths. The question arises, if the tabernacle is being taken down, have you got one? There is quite a big need for these cloths. It is not simply that they took the curtains of the tabernacle and draped them over these things; they were far too big for that. So

who has them? Paul speaks about those who "adorn the teaching" Titus 2:10. What do we bring to the testimony of which we have spoken? I would just like to say a simple word about these four different types of cloth. There is a badger skin, there are many cloths wholly of blue, there is a scarlet cloth and there is a purple cloth.

The badger skins have been likened to the principle of separation maintained among the people of God. I am sure that could be explained. I am sure it is right. They were, among other things, waterproof so that the elements of the wilderness did not penetrate into the holy place. The badgers (I do not think we would call them badgers, but hyraxes) lived in the desert and unlike these other cloths, they were suited to the desert. They were not conspicuous, in fact I imagine their skins were a form of camouflage, but the tabernacle system made extensive use of them. I make the observation about that, that the principle of separation is fundamental, but it is not intended to make you peculiar. It enables you to go through a contrary scene. You say, I am always having to explain to people that I cannot do this or that: that is not the badger skin. The badger skin is a life-style. I am not suggesting that you should falsify, compromise or water-down the principle of separation, but let me say again, it is not to make you peculiar. I want to show that the believer is distinctive, but not peculiar. People may think that a lot of your ways of looking at things are a bit different and they do not understand them, but there is no need to feel embarrassed about them. Think of these Kohathites travelling through the wilderness carrying all these things covered in badger skins. I suppose attention would have been drawn to the people carrying them, but the skins themselves were relatively inconspicuous. God is not putting you in a pillory and deliberately making you an object of man's ill-mannered attention; that is not what the path of separation is about. The path of separation is the only way through the desert. It is a way in which the support and the power of God, the priestly service of Christ, is proved. Think of all the things that were

gathered up in badger skins and put upon a pole. Imagine the Lord carrying you in all the tests and difficulties through which you pass.

Perhaps I should also say a word about the veil. The veil is used here as a cloth. The veil is the most beautiful thing in the whole tabernacle system. It speaks of the perfection of the glory of Christ. That perfection was an impenetrable barrier to Israel. It so measured their state that it was impossible to pass. Jesus has died and "the new and living way which he has dedicated for us through the veil, that is His flesh" Heb 10: 20. We stand before God in all the worth of that perfection before God. As you walk through the wilderness here, carry that thought with you. It was spread over the ark, recalling the place that Christ has at the very heart of everything for God: He could be the heart of everything for you, secured in your appreciation of what He is to God. These are things to aspire to. They are things to make you want to read, to make you want to come to the meetings - if only I could find out a little bit more about the detail in that glorious furnishing. Think of the embroidery of it, put in a stitch at a time. Would you not like to gather up things that enlarge what was in your heart answering to that glorious furnishing? You have that opportunity. You can carry the precious result of it as you walk your daily pathway here.

Then there are all these cloths of blue. I am not going to say that blue is heavenly. I do not say it is not, but the thing about the blue cloths were that they were wholly of blue. There was a purity about them. That is very much the lesson of 2 Timothy 2. It is about the purity, "follow righteous, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord out of pure heart". You cannot put your hand to divine things impurely. If you have ever done it, you will know how guilty you feel, but we can walk through a world full of defilement in this pure way. It comes in every aspect, all these parcels had blue cloths on them speaking of what was pure. If you stood inside the tabernacle in the holy place, and you looked round you, what you would see besides the gold was blue. It speaks of what is pleasing to God, it speaks about what suits God, it speaks about the conditions where God is at home. If you ever went to God's home, if

I may say so, you would come away with a wonderful sense of how pure it was. What a restful place it is on that account. Your heart can be the same. I wish I knew more about this, but my spirit could be enfolded in a cloth wholly of blue. How different I would feel, how differently I would take the storms of life and the pressures of the way.

Then there is the table of the show-bread, that is Christ as the one who sustains us before God. They spread a cloth of blue upon it and put all these vessels on it and the bread, and then they put over that a cloth of scarlet, and then over that a badger skin. We are not intended to be peculiar, but it is inescapable if you are answering to the call that you will be different. If people get to know you, underneath what they might find a rather plain exterior, they should find something distinctive. Could you say that there is something about you that is distinctive? Peter says, "Sanctify the Lord the Christ in your heart" 1 Peter 3: 15. Paul says, let His peace preside, "and be thankful" Col 3: 15. There was an old sister local here, as brethren will remember, who lived to one hundred and three, and one of the things she used to say was, 'there is always something to be thankful about'. When that sister reached the end of her time she was not really able to speak at all. She lived in one of the homes that I have spoken of, and the people in the home used to go and sit by her bed - not to have any conversation with her, but because, as they said, 'this is what they imagined a believer really ought to be'. The testimony was only in her spirit of thankfulness. I like to think of a scarlet cloth laid over the show-bread. Not much is in expression except something that is recognised to be quite different. Beloved, God has called you so that you too might be quite different and distinctive on that account.

I go on lastly to the altar. Over the altar was a purple cloth. It reminds us of John's gospel. I suppose the scarlet cloth reminds us of Matthew's gospel, but a purple cloth was spread over the altar. Think of the Lord Jesus going out to die wearing a purple robe. Very simply, does the One who died for us really come first to us? Would somebody who took account of the way I walked get any impression

of an altar being carried in a purple cloth? I sometimes feel that I shuffle through the world, prizing what I have of God but not making very much of it. But here are the Kohathites striding through the wilderness, carrying between them the brazen altar on which the sacrifice had been, covered with a purple cloth. They would say, You look at this, this is what really matters, this is what is really important. If there is one thing they would like you to go away with, it is some impression of what that speaks of. It speaks very simply, and the youngest can grasp this, of the One who suffered and died. He is worthy to be distinguished by everybody, not just as a matter of an assent, but in our daily lives. It should be Him and His glory that comes to the fore.

All these things lie behind the call. They are things of the utmost value, but you too are of the utmost value and you are worthy of these great things. God would help us all by His Spirit to be equal to them, "serviceable" - not just assigned to something that you feel you do not know how you are going to do, but one who in divine teaching has been shown how to fill the place that is theirs and to distinguish Christ in the doing of it.

May He bless the word.

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