

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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APPRECIATING THE LOVE OF CHRIST

G Bruce Grant

John 13: 21-25

1 Peter 5: 1-4

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I have read about John and Peter and Paul. Each of them knew and appreciated the love of Christ. The love of Christ is powerful. The apostle speaks of knowing the love of the Christ that surpasses knowledge (see Eph 3: 19). In the activity of His love, Christ will secure the universe for God. How immense that is! We were speaking in the reading of the Lord's service in His love towards us. Now we are speaking of three individuals who appreciated that love. Each of us needs to grow in our appreciation of that love. We learn it first in His suffering love for us. If you are a believer at all you have some appreciation that He took your place. What love, that He took upon Himself what was due to me from a righteous holy God. What love was expressed in that!

Each of these sections of scripture also speaks of what is among us. When the Lord was with His own, He spoke about what was extant among men, but then He adds "But it is not thus among you" (see Mark 10: v 43). In other words, He made a distinction between what was in the world and what was in the company of His own. "It is not thus among you." He also says "For the Son of man did not come to be ministered to but to minister" (v 45). That is a service of love - to minister. So in the Lord's mind there was a contrast between what was in the world and what was 'among us'. These two thoughts are before me - appreciating the Lord's love personally and, related to that, what is among us.

The passage we have read in John 13 is the first time that John speaks of himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved". This comes in immediately after the Lord's service to His own and specifically to John. John must have been so impressed by the Lord's service to him in feet washing that he now calls himself the disciple that Jesus loved. He did not always call himself that. He was conscious of the Lord's love. It is a great thing to be conscious of that love. It is enjoyable for its own sake, by itself. John took that position. "Now there was at table one of the disciples in the bosom of Jesus." John had learned that idea by his

contemplation of the Lord Himself - contemplating the Lord Jesus, in His relations with the Father. He was in the bosom of the Father. John learned that idea from contemplating the Lord and saw the attractiveness of it. He saw a son loving a father and a father loving a son. What an attractive relationship is seen in the Lord Jesus here in manhood, His affections going out towards the Father and the Father's affections resting on Him. He was an adequate Object for the affections of the Father, an adequate Object down here: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight." (see Matt 3:17).

I think that John learned about the bosom from contemplating the Lord. We have to learn everything from Him. The position in the Father's bosom is unique to the Lord Jesus, but John took up this position in the Lord's bosom. Literally, only one could take up that position at a time. But in the present situation, it is open to all of us to enjoy this position in the bosom of Jesus. Whatever happens in your life here, whatever happens in the testimony, this is open to you, the restfulness of this position. It saw John through difficult times - he was writing this after he wrote the book of the Revelation that the Lord gave to him. After all the decline, he writes a whole book about the relations between the Father and the Son. He saw the attractiveness of it. He appreciated the Lord's love in service towards him. He calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. We can all take that place as we enjoy the Lord's love. He did not always call himself that. He did not call himself that when he influenced someone wrongly (see John 18: 5) and when he came under wrong influence (see John 21: 2,3). Therefore we see the importance of keeping ourselves in the enjoyment of the love of the Lord Jesus.

He was in the bosom of Jesus, and then we see him leaning on the breast of Jesus. That speaks of the support of the Lord's love. His love sees us through in this testimonial scene and all that may come into it: it is a love we can rely on. You can lean your head on the Lord, as it were; you can rely on Him, turn to Him, and tell Him everything. Where we read in the reading it says "Jesus, knowing that his hour had come..." and "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands..." (see John 13: 1,3). How did John know that? We often think of John in His bosom saying "Lord, who is it?" He was near enough to the Lord to get that communication. But it also seems that he was near enough to know what was passing in the Lord's mind. He must have learned that from the Lord. It says here "Jesus knowing..."

In this place of intimacy with the Lord, the Lord communicates what was in His own mind to John.

Then in Peter we see one who certainly knew the service of the love of Christ towards him. It says "And the Lord, turning round, looking at Peter..." (Luke 22: 61); that is, looking intently. Andrew brought Peter to the Lord. It says, "Jesus looking at him said, Thou art Simon" (see John 1: 42). Think of it, the Lord of glory, God manifest in flesh here, and He took an interest in this individual, in Peter, as He has taken and takes an interest in you. He sees each one of us here and He is intensely interested in each of us as individuals. He looked at Peter. Peter at that point did not exactly follow the Lord. Later on he left all and followed Jesus. How the Lord served Peter! I find Peter very attractive. How patient and gracious the Lord was with Peter! Most of us are probably like Peter. John went through steadily in the enjoyment of the Lord's love; he is reliable and trustworthy. Peter was more up and down. He said things out of place. But the Lord continually served him. The Lord said "Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded to have you to sift you as wheat." (Luke 22: 31,32). That was the whole company. "But I have prayed for *thee* that thy faith fail not." The Lord was telling Peter that He was praying for him and we can rely on that, on the service of Christ towards us. Then he warns Peter, "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow today before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me." (Luke 22: 34). There He warns Peter. Then they are in the garden. In Matthew's account, the Lord says to Peter, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Matt 26: 41). The Lord said that to Peter, exhorting him to pray that he enter not into temptation. The Lord prays for us. But He also gives Peter a warning. Peter was self-confident. He exhorts Peter to pray, because He knew what Peter's heart was like. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He says, "Pray". That is open to each one of us: let us feel our dependence. Do not trust in yourself. Pray: be dependent.

Then Peter failed: he denied the Lord. So the Lord looked at him: "...turning round, looked at Peter." Think of that: in the High Priest's palace they were wrongly accusing the Lord, giving Him blows on the face, spitting on Him. The note says that these blows on the face were with a fist. Peter was there, and he denied his Lord and Master. And just at that point, the Lord, turning round, looked at Peter. The Lord was suffering there from men, and He is concerned about and interested in Peter. Whatever the Lord was going through, He had the time and the

love and the grace to turn and look at Peter. He had Peter in mind, as He has all of us in mind. It was a look of grace. "...turning round, looked at Peter." It is the same word as that used for the look with which He looked at Peter initially (see John 1: 42) He looked intently at Peter. What that must have done to Peter! There was the Lord, He was about to suffer from God and He was already suffering from men; what the Lord had on His spirit! Yet He looked in this loving and gracious way at Peter.

The poetess says:

"'Tis the look that melted Peter
'Tis that face that Stephen saw,
'Tis that heart that wept with Mary
Can alone from idols draw." (Idols, Miss Ora Rowan)

It was the look that melted Peter - what grace was in that look! Then the angel says: "Go, tell His disciples and Peter." (see Mark 16: 7). Peter had denied the Lord, but the Lord still had him in mind. He was not going to let Peter go. His affection was still the same towards Peter. Peter would have been feeling pretty bad, but the angel specifically mentions his name. And then it says, "The Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon" (Luke 24: 34). That was a private appearing to Simon. What went on then we do not know, but it brings out the importance of secret and private relations with the Lord Jesus. Nothing at all takes the place of that, however much you enjoy the company of the saints and being together with them, what underlies it all is your secret relations with the Lord Jesus. That is absolutely essential. I appeal to young people: keep on having to do with the Lord Jesus, keep on speaking to Him. Not only in a formal way you might think 'I must speak to the Lord before I go to sleep at night', and that is good: I always do - but you can speak to Him informally through the day also. Just speak to Him, have to do with Him. That is open to every one of us. How the Lord appreciates that! It is said that He appreciates our company more than we appreciate His. That is the Lord in His loving, shepherd service to Peter; He considered for him and thought of him in the time of His suffering. When He was raised, He appeared to Peter.

All of that underlies this section in chapter 5 of Peter's epistle. He is an elder, he had proved the loving shepherd service of Christ. He says: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am their fellow-elder." This is one elder speaking to others. It shows the importance of

elders. It involves years, but also moral weight and substance and love. You have influence among the saints as you love them. That is seen in John, about whom we spoke first. You can see in the letters John wrote that he had influence among the saints because of his love for them. That is our measure: not what we say or what we know, but our formation in the divine nature. That is our measure. Here is one elder speaking to fellow elders. It shows that Peter appreciated others. Peter was a witness of the sufferings of Christ - he spoke about that - and also spoke of himself as "partaker of the glory about to be revealed". He witnessed the sufferings of Christ: he says that he simply witnessed them. But he is going to be "partaker of the glory about to be revealed". Peter certainly appreciated Christ in His present position. He says "God has glorified his servant Jesus (see Acts 3: 13): that is Jesus in His present position. It is the glory about to be revealed: He is soon to be publicly revealed, manifested. But Peter says, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you." He is speaking to elders and he refers to the flock "among you". That is our present situation. Those who belong to God, the flock of God, are among us and there are persons who take responsibility. Peter puts it on these persons to shepherd the flock of God. Peter had learned the shepherd service of Christ, as we all have. As we experience that, we are qualified to shepherd the flock of God. Ezekiel speaks of God's flock (see Ezek 34: 15). God speaks of "my flock". In that section, there were false shepherds. That is not the idea here - it is persons who have proved the service of the Lord Jesus personally in His constant care and feeding and guiding. "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you" is the responsibility put upon these persons. Then it says: "but being models of the flock." We can speak to one another, but what about being models for the flock? "When the chief shepherd is manifested you shall receive the unfading crown of glory." The Lord is the Chief Shepherd. That means He is over others. We are all directly responsible to the Lord for how we care for one another. The more responsibility you take, the more you are answerable to the Lord Jesus, to the Chief Shepherd. There is the incentive of receiving the unfading crown of glory: there is an incentive to labour in this way, shepherding the flock of God.

How Paul was marked by this attitude! He speaks to these persons whom he addresses in Acts 20 of how he had been among them in all lowliness, in tears and temptations. He had laboured with his hands, how he shepherded the saints! Shepherding is care of the saints, but Paul also brings out in Acts 20 that it is care of the truth too. A

shepherd cares for the truth also, because he sees the danger ahead. He can see ahead. The sheep do not realise the danger, but the shepherd does. As we shepherd the flock of God we are responsible to care for the truth in its purity as it has come to us. That is all involved in shepherding. Sometimes this side of the truth is overlooked, but the Spirit would give discernment as to what might be involved in anything that comes in, that the truth is cared for. Shepherding is in view of the saints being held in relation to God's thoughts for them.

I want to speak about Paul. He was one who appreciated Christ's love. It is recorded, where we read, that it was said to him on the road to Damascus, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest". What light flooded into Paul's soul, what a change was brought about in that man! The Lord apprehended Paul, and then Paul desired to apprehend what he had been apprehended for. The Lord had laid hold of him. It is a great thing, dear believer friend, to apprehend what the Lord has apprehended you for, and to have part in the testimony here. But the fullness of what the Lord has apprehended you for is that you might be formed like Him now, formed in His features now. What moral perfection shone in the Lord Jesus, and shines in Him! We are left here so that that work can go on. I am always attracted to that verse "That I may gain Christ" (see Phil 3: 8). Paul wanted Christ for his gain. He was prepared to give up other things that he might have Christ. "That I may be found in Him" (v9). That is what Paul wanted. Is that your desire, dear friend, that Christ in His glory might be before you, Christ in His present position? "That I might be found in Him". Paul was already in Christ, but that was what was before him - his object - that he might be found more and more like Christ. He speaks of "the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus" (v14). That laid hold of Paul. He was pursuing to that end, that he might gain the prize. What a prize is set before us! We will be with Christ and like Him, like Him bodily, and like the features that mark His manhood. Think of that, 'That we may be found in Him'.

So Paul says here "I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God". That was the One who had apprehended him. "I am crucified with Christ and no longer live, *I*, but Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh" that is, in his body, "I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God." That is the way Paul lived, by the faith of the Son of God. The One of whom we have been speaking, who is already in final conditions (how attractive to think of it) - the Lord Jesus sets forth in Himself God's

thoughts for us. Paul wanted to lay hold of that and was engaged with that One: the faith of the Son of God. That is the One who is the Centre of that world. It is not exactly faith *in* the Son of God, although it involves that, but it is the faith *of* the Son of God, faith in relation to the One who is the Centre of that world, the world that God is patterning round this blessed One - the Son of God, who has loved me. Paul was in the current enjoyment of that love. As a fact it was historical, but it is present, and it is a moral thought that brings it right forward to the present day. You might say, 'Why does Paul say this?' Paul was moving among the saints in a way that was commendable. He did not take counsel with flesh and blood, and he went to Arabia. When a matter came in, a matter of the truth that threatened to take away the very foundations of Christianity, Paul withstood Peter. Paul was conscious that the Lord was loving him as he acted in that way - "who has loved me and given Himself for me". Paul was crucified with Christ - "no longer live I". The cross comes into this epistle a lot. I think that Paul was standing by the cross in writing this epistle to the saints in the area of Galatia. How attractive it is to read in John 19 of those who stood by the cross of Jesus (see v 25). In John's gospel it speaks of Jesus going out bearing His cross (v 17): the cross of Christ. The Person is attached to the cross. It gives the cross its value because of the Person, the cross of Jesus. The women in John were standing there, in affection, prepared to stand in a place of reproach because of what Jesus meant for them. Because of what Jesus meant to Paul, he was prepared to stand by the cross. He stood by it in an area, in Galatia, and he stood by it in a locality in Corinth.

He goes on to speak of that here. He says "O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you; to whom, as before your very eyes, Jesus Christ has been portrayed, crucified among you?" He does not actually say it was himself, but we can infer that it was. What features would you look for in a man in whom Jesus Christ was portrayed crucified among you? What features would you expect to see? You would see them in Paul. He did not take counsel with flesh and blood. Personalities did not weigh with Paul; Christ did. A man who portrayed Christ crucified would have no ambition in this world, no prospect. The cross is where the man that sinned had been ended, ended and condemned in God's Son. That is what God thinks of the man that sinned. That is true of us all. The poison of the serpent is in every one of us, and the cross deals with that, the man after the flesh, the man upon whom Satan can operate in so many different ways. Paul gave no

place to that. He portrayed Christ crucified among them. He was not giving place to the flesh in a religious way or in any other way among these saints, and he is the same in relation to Corinth. How important that is. I notice, particularly in older ministry, that the cross was ministered. It is absolutely essential. What gives it its value is the Person that was there. We therefore need to seek to be true, in the Spirit's power, to the truth of the cross. We must be prepared to suffer because of what the Lord means to us. "But 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." It was reciprocal - the world was crucified to Paul, and he to the world. The world did not think anything of Paul, nor of Christ. The more we are marked by the moral features of Christ, the less the world will think of us. Paul had a judgement of the world as a system and its features - the world is crucified to me. Christ had such a place in his affections. Oh that He might have a greater place in my affections!

I was just impressed by this, that "Jesus Christ has been portrayed, crucified among you." What features do we set forth as we move about among the saints? "Crucified among you". There would be no ambition, but rather lowliness and meekness. Think of how the Lord suffered on that cross - "Who when reviled, reviled not again" (1 Pet 2: 23). These were the features of the Man who was on the cross. How attractive to heaven to see the moral features that shone out in the Lord, the obedience: "Becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross" (Phil 2: 8). How important to be maintained in our souls in the truth that is set forth in the cross of Christ. Paul here speaks of this glorious Person who had taken over his life, meaning that he served Him and suffered for Him like none other did. Oh that the Lord Jesus might fill our affections, so that we might be here for Him, and that His love might lay hold of us in such a way that our lives might therefore be for Him. That is what Paul's life was. Paul loved the persons that the Lord loved. He had been persecuting them, but then he served and served and served them.

That is open to us in whatever measure it is open to us, but it all depends on this personal relationship, the enjoyment of the Lord's love. Paul lived in the joy of it and the joy of the Person that is there. I love that, and all the brethren do. In Philippians 3, such an attractive chapter, we see Paul the Christian, we see what gave Paul his energy, helped him in his way here. He contemplated Christ in His moral

excellence in chapter 2 - the Lord as the Model - and then Christ where He is gave Paul the energy to continue, and Christ satisfied his heart. How attractive He is in His present position! May we be more occupied with Him, more engaged with Him. God has given us this Object for our affections. He is available to us by the Spirit. Faith and the Spirit operate together so that we might have this blessed Man as our Object, so that we might be more like Him as He was here.

May the Lord bless the word.

Grangemouth

27 January 2007

WHAT THE ASSEMBLY IS TO US

John Gray

Matthew 16: 13-18;

1 Timothy 3: 14, 15;

1 Corinthians 11: 17, 18; 14: 22-25;

Acts 11: 20-26

We have been speaking of the greatness of Christ in our reading together. It is a matter which is cause for rejoicing in heaven always and should be a matter for rejoicing and celebration with us, the greatness of the One who is our Head in heaven. As we have been taught, if He is a Head in heaven, His body is here on earth; and I wish to say something about what the assembly, which is His body, is to us. I know it is a very large subject, but I just touch on the points that we have read about. The greatness of what God is doing at the present time is quite amazing.

For the last two thousand years God has wrought in relation to this first reference the Lord makes to building His assembly. It is an interesting matter that Mr Darby should translate the word 'assembly', involving a gathering together of persons, but it is not merely the persons as a multitude, but as a corporate whole, one body. The assembly is the body of Christ. That is a very big subject by itself. When the children of Israel were first alerted to their exodus from Egypt, God said to Moses that he should speak to the assembly of the children of Israel (Ex 12:3), that was that *that* people were now viewed, not as a scattered community working in Egypt under the task masters - under considerable strain, but as a corporate whole. What a wonderful concept that is, that the saints who are in Christ, including, I hope, all of us here today, belong to this wonderful and august vessel which God has had in His mind.

The assembly is not an afterthought. The Scriptures, particularly Ephesians, make it clear that the assembly was, "hidden throughout the ages in God", Eph 3: 9. That means that it was in the purpose of God that He should have a consort for Christ, an answer to Himself that might reflect glory to God. That is the ultimate that we get in Ephesians.

The Authorised Version speaks of the church and many use that expression, but the reference to church means, 'of the Lord', and while that is all right, it does not express as clearly as Mr Darby has the

full idea of what the assembly means. There has been a departure in Christendom by many believers to what people might call 'Churchianity'; that is, that people centre things and their lives on a church and not on Christ, whereas persons who belong to the assembly ought to centre things on a Man in glory. That is the service of the Spirit, and those who belong to the assembly have the Spirit of God within them, and are temple of God, 1 Cor 3: 16.

In Matthew the Lord raises questions about opinions, and that is extant. We could modernise this to the present time. There are many opinions in churches of believers and others who are Christian in name, and believers who have had the light of the assembly, and sadly have gone away in relation to certain matters. This results in opinions which are different from the way in which the Spirit of God is speaking. That is another important aspect that the Spirit of God is speaking to the assemblies, that is the local assemblies at the present time such as was at Corinth. We get that from the Lord's words in Revelation 2 and 3, "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies", Rev 2: 7. That is an indication that persons who have the Spirit would be lending an ear to what the Spirit is saying. There are all these opinions or voices that come up. Paul speaks "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of undistinguishable sound", 1 Cor 14: 10. He says, "For also, if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for war?", 1 Cor 14: 8.

The Lord is testing the disciples, and we get this confession of Peter's, "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the living God". How fine that is! That is the result of God's work in Peter's soul by itself.

Dear fellow believers, are we all conscious of that work which is come into our souls by the Holy Spirit's operations, in that we are born anew? And are we all conscious that the Spirit of God has operated through the principle of the revelation of the Father, as the Lord says, "flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in the heavens"? That is, it has its origin in heaven and it means that its destiny is going to be there too. The assembly belongs to heaven, and while we are down here, while the Spirit of God is enlisted to do the building of the assembly that the Lord has in mind in this chapter, heaven is the real destiny. That is where we will be.

The greatness of what is revealed to Peter is a real matter, "I say unto thee that *thou* art Peter, and on this rock I will build my

assembly". The Lord is building and He has been building, all these centuries, twenty of them. What a wonderful thing that persons are moving forward, century after century, and the Lord is building! The Spirit of God is enlisted to do the work, and the work belongs to God. Being born anew is in some sense a mysterious matter - God is working in your soul. Peter then comes out with this confession which shows that God's work, the revelation from the Father was there in his soul. Let us be truly conscious as to the greatness of this, the sheer magnificence that God should come and start anew in your soul and mine. The assembly is composed of persons like that. That is the building - "on this rock I will build my assembly". The confession that Peter made shows that it was there and it says, "hades' gates shall not prevail against it". While the body is an organism, which suggests the inward part relating to the assembly, the Lord's word "I will build my assembly, and hades' gates will not prevail against it" shows that God has in view an outward manifestation also.

When we come to Timothy we find that there is something additional which is connected with God's house, and is connected with our conduct in relation to God's house, the assembly of the living God. Paul says, "if I delay, in order that thou mayest know how one ought to conduct oneself in God's house"; that is, he was taking time by experience and reflection to see how Timothy would proceed in a practical way and exhibit and show what was there of God - of Christ. The assembly of the living God is the outward expression of it. The pillar suggests that there is a testimony there, you can see it, "the pillar and base of the truth". That is a very challenging matter, because I feel challenged as to whether I am alongside the saints in assembly convening in support of the base of the truth. The base is an expression of what the assembly is by the Spirit here. The Spirit of God is in the assembly. The Spirit of God has come to take up His abode in each one and in the house, in the assembly, a very important aspect. These things are not to be merely doctrinal with us. Paul speaks of the base and the pillar of the truth and he means that it will be supported. There is no doubt about it, but whether I am in the support is another question, and I would like each one of us to be in it, actively and livingly supporting the assembly of the "living God". The Spirit of God is livingly and actively in it. What about the principles of the truth? The assembly as coming out of the death of Christ demonstrates something which is completely different. The scripture says "for the Spirit is the truth", 1 John 5: 6. The Lord Jesus was the truth when He was here in

manhood, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14: 6) and He still is that. He is unchanged, but in testimony the Spirit is here, resident in the assembly. Do I support what is proceeding? Are the principles maintained, those principles that have been secured at such cost, the death of Christ, resulting in the glory of Christ, and the Spirit having been given to us, being sent from heaven? That is a challenge that we should take up, that the base of the truth might be maintained and kept in all our places. The local assembly is spoken of in Corinth. This is the general position that Paul is speaking about.

The pillar is another interesting thing and it is associated with our testimony, that which can be seen. I think it may be ornamental as well. It would adorn the position for God.

In Corinthians Paul tells the saints how these matters are worked out in each local place. In 1 Corinthians 11, we have the very important matter of the Supper, which those who love the Lord Jesus would always value. Coming to the Supper is not optional - I use that word in accordance with what Paul says, because when he speaks of ministry meetings in chapter 14 he says, "*If* therefore the whole assembly come together in one place", but in chapter 11, he says, "For first, *when* ye come together in assembly" That is, that those who love Christ will undoubtedly come together, those who are washing their robes (Revelation 22: 14); those who are morally clear, and sound, and separate from the world will come to the Lord's supper. It is not optional, "*when* ye come together". Do I come together in that spirit that the Lord's supper leads me to the service of praise to God? It leads us to the area where not only are there sons who are brought to the Father, but there is a vessel, the assembly, giving glory to God, and in the midst of which Christ sings. Would I miss that? Why should I miss it? If I am absent through illness, that is another matter. What I stress is this matter of coming together in assembly, "*when* ye come together in assembly"; that is, you have the assembly of the living God in your heart and mind. You are assembling together with others who are of the same thought and mind and desire and you are one with them. The coming together envisages one corporate whole. For some of the younger people that may be difficult to work out and see, but, if the Lord leaves you here in the testimony for a year or two yet, you will come to see, dear young fellow believer, the greatness of what it is to have this living entity in your heart and mind and to respect every one in it. And to respect what God has done. He has brought us to Christ to come to

know our Saviour and Friend. He has brought us to know the Holy Spirit livingly in our lives, and we appreciate that in each one. So, as we gather together it is not just a formality, it is not just to do certain things, to read hymns out of a hymn book, and make certain prayers out of a prayer book and then go home. No, there is a living character about it because we belong to a living organism which is associated with the living Spirit of God and the living God Himself. Let us be encouraged to understand that as we gather together for the Lord's supper there is the sense in which the magnificence of what God has done outside of anything that we are ordinarily or naturally, comes together. The saints assemble themselves and present themselves there at the Lord's supper that there might be a manifestation afresh of the glory of Christ.

When we come to chapter 14 we have Paul speaking about prophecy. He speaks about prayer in the assembly and that is another important matter that we should attend to. In the assembly what is brought out is the importance, not of the tongues, but of the prophecy. Paul stresses that. The idea of prophecy brings us to the introduction through one and another of the mind of God for the moment. What God has in His mind in a meeting for ministry for brethren in a place must be living because it comes in as the "living and abiding word of God", 1 Pet 1: 23. We should be concerned, beloved brothers, as we enter into the ministry meeting, that there is this character of prophecy bringing in the mind of God for the moment, what is current, "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies", Rev 2: 7. What Paul says is that if you are going to speak with tongues and simple persons or unbelievers come in they are going to say, 'you are mad, I cannot understand it', but if you bring the current mind of God in, there is a living character in it. What effect is that going to have on those who are present? There will be a quickening touch, something that will rouse things in your life, or maybe rouse something in the lives of others who come in. What a good thing that is, the living character of prophecy being brought in at the present time, and it is associated with the desire of persons to gather together, "*If therefore the whole assembly come together in one place ... and a simple person enters in, or an unbeliever, ... he is convicted of all, he is judged of all; the secrets of his heart are manifested; and thus, falling upon his face, he will do homage to God*". That is, that persons are secured for the service of God. They are secured in conviction, repentance falling down involves that. If there are underlying matters that need to be attended to, God will have a living word for it, but it would bring in something that would set us

forward because primarily the ministry meeting is intended to bring in consolation and encouragement and edification.

These things are very testing and it is important for us as we gather together for ministry that we do not say what persons cannot understand. We speak the living word of God for the moment, for that week. It is also important that the impressions that the Spirit of God gives to one and another should come forward. Young brothers should be encouraged not to remain silent. If you have an impression from the Lord's supper or from some meeting that has fastened on to you, then as you read the Scriptures and read the ministry and follow it up, do not be slow to bring that impression forward. It is not just old brothers that take part in ministry meetings. It should also include younger men coming forward with something living, active and fresh that would bring in their part and enjoyment as we gather together in the assembly. We come together to express what is of Christ. How living it becomes.

As we go on we find in Acts that there are two other aspects of the assembly. First of all there was Cornelius in chapter 10 who was a Gentile, and then in chapter 11 we find that certain ones who went out from Jerusalem and Samaria went as far as Antioch and spoke to Greeks. It was a momentous time in the testimony. The assembly does not comprise only persons who had a Jewish background, but persons of every nation. Revelation brings that out, "out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation", Rev 5: 9. How extensively God has worked. They announce "the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus" which is an assembly expression. "The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. And the report concerning them reached the ears of the assembly which was in Jerusalem". It is a very interesting matter that the assembly listens to what is proceeding which is of value to God in the testimony. If we use a current example we might cite the interest the brethren have had in the revival in certain souls in India, where there has been so much interest in the truth. God has been active, and there has been increase from it. That has reached our ears, the ears of the assembly. It is not just the news of what happens in families, in the young people getting engaged and married, and so on. It is what is of interest to the testimony of God reaching the ears of the assembly.

Then these persons send out Barnabas. It says, "he went away to Tarsus to seek out Saul". Quite clearly God was giving a living, current word to that man in relation to the movements of the testimony.

Why would he go and look out Saul? But God has in mind the full revelation of the assembly. It is true that the basis was there in the twelve, but the full light of the mystery as to Christ and the assembly was left to Paul. He had it immediately on his conversion, "why persecutest thou *me*?" Acts 22: 7. Christ was in glory but His assembly was down here, His body was here. These saints Saul was persecuting, who were despised as the offscouring of the world, they were Christ's assembly. Then we read, "And so it was with them", not just Barnabas, "that for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd". That is another aspect that God has set certain in the assembly, as Paul tells the Corinthians, 1 Cor 12: 28. He also speaks in Ephesians 4 as to Christ ascended on high having given gifts to men (v 12). That is respected. The assembly does not preach or teach, but persons are set in it that they might teach, and that they might shepherd. There is shepherding continuing in the assembly - "shepherd the assembly of God", Acts 20: 28. There are many gifts, but this matter of shepherding and teaching is very important for us. "They were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd: and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch". That means that there must have been some real evidence that the teaching had an effect before they were actually called Christians at Antioch, followers of Christ. There must have been Christ-like features there with the persons before they would be called Christians. But what I want to emphasise is the importance of the teaching, and the need for it.

Dear young brethren, many of us are getting older and if the Lord does not come soon, we will not be here; will the testimony of the assembly be in your hands, and you not be taught in the truth? The teaching is specific. You must give yourselves to the Scriptures. Many things have to be attended to, the study at school, or work, or business, but do not let it crowd out the Lord's things - the things of the assembly. What are more important for eternity? The things of the assembly are, because she is the consort of Christ, she is at present the wife of Christ. That is another aspect of the assembly that she cares, caring for the interests of the Lord in His absence. Soon she will be the bride of Christ, coming out as John gives the picture in the Revelation as a bride "adorned for her husband", Rev 21: 2. Paul was giving instruction to these people. It is the same in Acts 19 as to the disciples who first came to light in Ephesus. There was contention over what they were speaking about, and Paul separated the disciples. He wanted them to

be in an area where they would understand the truth of the assembly, where they would understand the greatness and glory of Christ, where they would understand the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, Eph 3: 9. If we do not follow the teaching of the Scriptures and the teaching of the ministries of the revival then we may be at a loss and may find ourselves being tripped up by Satan in some things that we do because we do not know the teaching.

Dear young people, I encourage you to spend time reading the Scriptures. Paul emphasises that to Timothy, "which are able to make thee wise unto salvation", 2 Tim 3: 15. That is complete salvation. Every scripture is profitable. Then the ministries of the revival in the nineteenth century are very important. These ministries have opened up the Scriptures to us, authoritative ministry, much of which was provided through enquiry in the temple by which God revealed and unfolded these previously hidden thoughts in the Scriptures. We should follow it and take time to understand a little of it. Do not expect to read a whole series of Mr James Taylor's readings at three day meetings and hope to understand it all at once! Do it a piece at a time, that is the idea of being taught for a whole year. It will all help to contribute to our part in the assembly and the service of God.

There are other things which we have not spoken about, such as shepherding the assembly of God, and Paul speaks about Phoebe as a deaconess of the assembly, Rom 16: 1. There are many other matters of care and interest, but eventually God is going to gather all together in this wonderful corporate vessel which will be the bride of Christ and which will express glory to God. We would not like to be left out of that would we?

May we be encouraged that these few thoughts would stimulate our desire that we might enter into the appreciation more and more of what the assembly is and our part in it and our respect for one another in it. Paul says, "each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves", Phil 2: 3. That is the true assembly spirit because it follows the spirit of Jesus.

May we be encouraged by these thoughts. For His Name's sake.

London
17th March 2007

CLOTHED

C Kenneth Robinson

Zechariah 3: 2-5

Romans 3: 21-25

Luke 15: 20-25

Luke 24: 49

This verse in Zechariah contains a beautiful expression - "I clothe thee with festival-robles". I would like to speak on that, to give everyone a sense of God's desire for each of us to prove what it is to be clothed by God for His glory and satisfaction and delight. Each one of us could put ourselves into this passage of scripture. Jehovah is looking upon each individual, but so is Satan. Now there is no doubt from this passage who triumphs - God triumphs. God operates to change the total appearance of this person called Joshua. Joshua is standing before God there, clothed in filthy garments. God says: 'I want to clothe you in festival-robles.' What a blessing! What a gospel this is for you - for every one of us to realise initially that, as clothed and standing there in our sins, we are in filthy garments before God. God says to Satan as to Joshua, and as to every one of us in this room, "Jehovah rebuke thee!". It is the effect of Satan and his power and influence on a person that he is clothed in filthy garments. Have you had some sense of that in your history? In the sight of God, the all-seeing eye of Jehovah, as He looks upon you and your history as away from God, you are numbered amongst those described in the scripture, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God". God is however looking upon you as an individual, and Satan is also looking upon the individual. God is really asserting that, 'I am going to change that person. I am going to secure that person for time and for eternity.' How wonderful that is! So He can say later on "Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" God is still like that. Do you have some sense that mercy has reached you? That you are a brand plucked from the fire? What a beautiful expression that is - is it not? Some of these expressions that come into the prophets are beautiful. We have referred to Isaiah today already and how many beautiful expressions there are that describe a condition and God's interest and care and desire for an individual. Think of Joshua standing there and God says, "Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" You think of that, the impending fire, and what really it is to be a brand plucked from the fire or (in New Testament language) a sinner saved by grace. God says, in effect, 'take away the

filthy garments from off them'. That is the gospel! How is your sinful condition going to be met? *You* do not take off the filthy garments - it is a command from God - and God says, "Take away the filthy garments from off him". How wonderful to come to that point when you grasp the value of the work of Jesus, and when you look to see that the God that we read of in Romans chapter 3 has been manifested in Jesus, and in the work of Christ; and how great and glorious it is, so that God is now presenting in the gospel the "righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all", and upon you - yes, "upon all those who believe"! How glorious that is. Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus? Have you got a sense of the precious work of Jesus and what it accomplished for you? You see it is God that has operated to deal with your condition and mine. We must ever remember that - and when we do it brings a touch of mercy into our souls knowing that we deserved nothing. "God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love wherewith He loved us" (Eph 2: 4) has operated from His side and presented His well beloved Son, who "made by Himself the purification of sins", Heb 1: 3. How glorious and full is the work of Jesus!

What a day it was, the day of atonement - in Leviticus 16. There came a day in the history of the children of Israel - one per year - when there was a day of atonement. It was distinctive because the high priest went in. He went in with the blood of the bullock - he went in in the virtue of the sin offering; he went in with his hands full of fragrant incense. He went in, anticipating the light and glory of the perfection of the offering of Jesus. What a day it must have been for the children of Israel; they waited for that day, the tenth day on the seventh month of every year. That day would come! They would wake up that day and all the tribes would consider: this is the day of atonement! This is the day when we are cleansed yearly from our sins. We speak now however in the gospel of a work that has been done forever. Yes, forever. Jesus has accomplished the work at Calvary's cross once. So we do not need to have a date on our calendar which says, 'this is the day of atonement'. Christ has accomplished the work *once* to the glory of God and for eternity - how wonderful that is!

And so what a day it was - I just want to draw on it, and expand on it. It describes the greatness of the perfection of Jesus. He who was without sin was the One who offered Himself spotless to God. Think of heaven looking on - what a moment it was for heaven. You think of the greatness and glory of the Father and of all that marked Him as He

looked down on Jesus, and He comes to the day, one of the greatest days in the annals of time. It had been looked forward to through countless offerings - indeed thousands of offerings in the past dispensation. Then *the* day came in the history of time when the Lord Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son, went forth, condemned to death by man. He went forth, a crown of thorns placed upon Him, a purple robe put upon Him, and He moved from Pilate's judgment hall to Calvary. He had endured so much at the hands of men - scoffing, spitting, they struck His face, in an atmosphere of absolute hate. Do you not marvel at God's long-suffering? The God who could at any moment have consumed every one who dared to show such animosity to the One who was perfect and apart from sin. "Who, when reviled, reviled not again; when suffering, threatened not", 1 Peter 2: 23. They took His clothes off Him - and He comes to Golgotha. There they crucified Him. They lifted Him up, hung Him on a tree, nailed His hands and nailed His feet. Love kept Him there, love for you and for me - that we may never stand before God in filthy garments. This was to be the basis of what was going to lead to you being clothed with festival robes. From the third hour then, to the sixth hour, Jesus endured at the hands of men. Mr Darby says, 'He suffered for righteousness, as a living Man, from men'. God looked on and surveyed the scene in a perfect assessment according to the righteousness of His holy throne.

But a greater moment was yet to take place. From the third hour to the sixth hour the Lord bore it all at the hands of men. His moral glory shone - if I may say simply - minute by minute. But the Lord Jesus knew there was more yet to come. From the sixth hour, darkness came over the whole land, and from the sixth hour to the ninth hour Jesus was made sin. Can you take that in? As Mr Darby said, 'He suffered for righteousness, as a living Man, from men; as a dying Saviour, He suffered from the hand of God for sin' (Collected Writings vol 7 p165)! How important as believers that we understand the importance of the third hour to the sixth hour; and then the sixth hour to the ninth hour when Jesus was made sin. "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us", 2 Cor 5: 21. Words fail to describe just what sin was as far as God was concerned. Think of the whole epitome of what characterised an administration under Satan being sin, and the effect of it is upon souls. Yet God has provided the basis in the sacrificial work of Jesus for its clearance and removal from His sight.

So from the sixth hour to the ninth hour there was no

communion. He was the holy One. Mr Darby said - 'In the measure in which He knew holiness and love...He felt what it was to be made sin', (Letters vol 3: p195). The abandonment of Jesus was absolute. He was the One who could say, "Father, I know that Thou always hearest me"; the One who could earlier say, on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34.

Did thy God e'en then forsake Thee,
Hide His face from Thy deep need! (Hymn 302)

I point you to the work of Jesus in its completeness. How wonderful, how glorious it is! The preacher has the privilege of speaking about a perfect work. Men are incapable of anything totally perfect. We are not speaking about perfection according to man's judgment, but we are speaking about the perfection of a work according to God's judgment. The Lord Jesus at the ninth hour could cry, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Think of the depth of that cry. The Lord Jesus in His perfection committed in love to the divine will, in love fully offering Himself without spot to God, and in all of that consuming the judgment. You think of the cry going up (and remember there was darkness), uttered from the cross: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? ... My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matt 27: 46.

Then He uttered another cry - a second cry goes up. Think of the greatness and glory of His expiring. What a wonderful matter the Lord Jesus coming into manhood, being such a glorious person, the One who upholds all things by the word of His power. What a matter it is that He went into death. The Lord of life lay in death. Not only had your sinful acts to be atoned for, but the very sin itself that characterises us in the first order of man had to be removed before God. Christ removes not only our sins but sin from before the sight of God. What a work!

So, He goes into death and, having died, the soldier pierces His side and "immediately there came out blood and water", John, 19: 34. Precious blood of Jesus shed on Calvary's cross:

Precious, precious blood of Jesus,
Shed on Calvary!
Shed for rebels... (Hymn 167)

- shed for people clothed in filthy garments. 'Shed for sinners', and I trust we can all say, 'Shed for me' How precious it is, the work of Jesus.

This is not a theory. My eternal salvation and yours is not based on any theory. It is not based in any thesis that somebody has put together. We are dealing with the very core of Christian truth when we refer to the blessing of a soul through God giving a person faith to view that work, and see it is for them. God gives them faith. God has looked down on their history and would give them faith. What a gift!

The only way you will be blessed eternally is by faith in Christ. You believe in it for yourself. You are absolutely convicted as to the verity of it, and so nothing will ever shake you. I trust that you feel like that about the gospel - that nothing will ever shake you as to your faith in the person and work of the One who glorified God on Calvary's cross and laid the basis in His precious blood that has guaranteed you eternal blessing.

Faith is a wonderful gift! We come across people and we can have a conversation with them. People come in to the preaching and they go away... The secret is faith, faith from God. It has been described as being like when you are in a dark room, and it is all dark. Somebody puts the light on and the whole room becomes illuminated. That is faith for you. When everything lightens up and, all of a sudden, the whole matter of Christ's finished work, the value of His precious blood, becomes living, vital, wonderful and glorious to you! This is because you now believe it for yourself.

So Christ died and was buried. For three days and three nights He was in the heart of the earth, and God then gave testimony to His full acceptance of the work of Jesus by raising Him from amongst the dead. We speak of the righteousness of God in Romans chapter 3, and it is upon the believer. Think of God now clothing you and me in righteousness! Your righteousness? No. Because it would be as filthy garments. It would be as filthy rags. God says 'I am going to clothe you with my righteousness. It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ and it is towards all. The work is complete, I am presenting my Son.'

God is now offering you the wedding garment according to Matthew 22. You are to be clothed in it. As He says in effect to Joshua - 'I am going to clothe you with festival robes'. I would like to say to you that God wants to clothe you tonight with the wedding garment of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You say, 'What about my history?' Christ has removed it before God if you are a believer. You say, 'Will it never be brought up?' God has justified you in a risen Man.

I love that little incident that Mr Meek used to tell us about justification. It is about a little boy, a naughty boy, and his father took a stick and put a nail in it every time the little boy was naughty. So there were a number of nails on that stick. Then the boy came to his dad and says 'I am sorry, I am sorry'. So the father took out the nails from the wood. You may say, 'That is it finished'. But that little boy was still crying. And the father asks, 'What is wrong with you?' The boy replies 'You took away the nails but you left the marks'. Justification is complete. My history is removed before God. God has justified me in Christ. I trust everyone here, if you have not grasped that before, will accept it as a truth tonight. God would clothe you with the festival robe of justification in a risen Man for another world altogether.

I go on to Luke 15. What clothing this was - these are the festival robes of Luke 15, when the younger son returns. The hymn says, does it not,

'Returning sons He kisses
And with the robe invests'?

Did the *younger son* bring the wedding robe back? No. Did *he* bring the ring back? No. Did *he* bring the sandals back? No. The younger son came back destitute. He had spent everything. But he came back as a broken man. He longed to be back in the environment that he had left. But he went back in to the house clothed differently from the way in which he had left. He went out with the money, he went out full of exuberance - he went off. But when he came back - you think of the reception he got. Mr Stoney said, 'Love travels faster than necessity', (NS vol 1 p27). Necessity brought the younger son back, but love was there first in the father running, when he saw him coming back. The father is ready at that point to invest him in festival robes. So he comes back; and what has he to say? "I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son" Luke 15: 21. I do not think it was just what he said. The father looked at him and knew that he meant it. He knew he meant it. There is a big thing in that - in repentance. It is not the words themselves, it is what lies behind them. God sees what lies behind what you say. And so repentance is a deep matter. You may confess your sins, but God looks behind and says 'You really are convicted about it.' You deserve judgment. You are claiming mercy from God and He is prepared to grant you it in Christ. So he says "bring out the best robe and clothe him in it". Would it not fit perfectly? The younger son never looked better

than when he stood there before the father with the best robe on. Clothed from head to foot, you may say, in festival garments, with a ring on his hand, and sandals on his feet.

Have you had some sense of God investing you with the best robe? What is the best robe? It is Christ according to the greatness of what He means to the Father. What great things these are. So you can stand up and have a part in the service of God and give thanks to the Father for sonship, knowing that you have been clothed in the best robe. You are clothed in Christ, in all the worth, the glorious worth of Christ.

"Bring out the best robe and *clothe* him in it." Not just put him in it. 'Clothe' means, I think, that it fits. When you get a suit, a jacket, or whatever, it clothes you. It fits you. This is wonderful. Do you get some sense of the divine presence? It embraces you; it is glorious in that sense. I think that is when the truth has moved more than just into your mind but it has reached into your inwards and your affections. You look on yourself now as a son.

Lastly just to touch on another aspect. One of the blessings of the gospel is to be clothed with the Holy Spirit. Christ is glorified and the truth is brought out. The Lord Jesus is saying to the disciples that He is going away but that He wants them to receive the Holy Spirit and be clothed with power from on high. Not just the acknowledgment of the truth about the Holy Spirit objectively, but these souls, a hundred and twenty in the upper room - literally the Holy Spirit sat upon each one of them, Acts 2: 3. We are just a small company here. Compare it to a hundred and twenty souls in the upper room, the day of Pentecost approaching. You think of all of that happening, and the Holy Spirit coming there, and every one of these souls had some sense of the reception of the Holy Spirit of God. What a blessing! Christ in glory, God here in the Spirit indwelling souls. Previously, they were clothed in filthy garments but now they are redeemed by the precious work of Jesus, and justified in a risen Man. We have thought of the great truth of sonship, and the greatness and glory of it all. But do we enjoy it all? Further, we need to be clothed with the Holy Spirit. Let us all not just know of the reception of the Holy Spirit but have the enjoyment and present experience of His power. You are clothed with power from on high. You say - power. John would tell us, "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John 4: 4. The power is in two ways. Power for access Godward and power for confession before men, to

overcome the flesh, to overcome the world and its influences as it would seek to drag you down again into a sinful condition. Satan would have his eye upon you. Satan has no answer in the believer to the present resource of the power of the Holy Spirit. That is something we all need to remember.

Well I just leave these thoughts - to be clothed with festival robes. Go home from the preaching tonight with some sense of having been clothed in festival robes.

For His Name's sake.

21 January 2007

Port Seton, Edinburgh

FULL OF THE SPIRIT

David Wright

Acts 4 v 8-12; 6 v 1-7; 7 v 54-60; 9 v 17-21; 11 v 19-26; 13 v 6-12

It will be observed, dear brethren, that these Scriptures refer to persons who are said to be full of the Holy Spirit. I do not want to go into the detail of every chapter, but I would like to arrest your interest in what was said and done by such persons and the features that they showed. It would help us all, and the young ones, therefore, to establish what finds its source in the Holy Spirit. I will just take them up in the order in which they come in the Scriptures. I hesitate to take this subject up because I am conscious of my own failures; but nevertheless these things are in the Scriptures and they are for our education.

The first person said to be full of the Holy Spirit is Peter. He had a distinctive place in the launching of this dispensation in which we are. He was one of those that the Holy Spirit came and sat upon at Pentecost. One significant feature about Peter's early preaching was the magnification of the Man in heaven. That is one feature that will always find its source in the Holy Spirit. You wonder at the boldness and the faithfulness of Peter there in Jerusalem, where, just days earlier, the Lord Jesus was crucified; but he boldly says, "God has made him, this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ", Acts 3: 34. What a contrast! It was not that He was going to do it, but God has already done it, He has made Him both Lord and Christ. He has installed Him in the greatest office of His universe and He is morally qualified to be there. The power and coming of the Holy Spirit was evident in these early days. This lame man had been at the Beautiful gate of the temple. Peter says to him, "silver and gold I have not; but what I have, this I give to thee". It resulted in a man that leaped and walked and praised God. The effect of the power of the Holy Spirit could not therefore be gainsaid. Peter was asked by what authority he did these things, and he says to them, that it is in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean, the One who was here, the lowly, despised, rejected Man. It is in the power of that Name that that man walked and leaped and praised God; the one that had no place in this religious world's system. He says, "the stone which has been set at nought by you the builders"; that is, they had their own building and their own system of things, but Christ had no place in it. That One has become Head of the corner, there is another order of things which the Holy Spirit would connect us with, drawing attention and linking us to the

ascended Man in heaven. There is a centre and an order of things on the other side of death, in a glorious, living Man. It is in the power of that One that these things were done and “salvation is in none other, for neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved”. Peter drew attention to the one Person in whom salvation was. Now, dear young people, if you hear those kinds of things in the magnification of Christ, the source of it is the Holy Spirit.

It is a different setting entirely in chapter 6. There was a murmuring among the Hellenists against the Hebrews because their widows were overlooked in the daily ministration. It was a situation of which the enemy could have taken full advantage. The apostles had their ministry, so that others were appointed to look into this matter, an administrative matter. Gift is not referred to but they are told to look out from among their own selves seven men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. You might say that gift is not needed, but what is needed is for persons to have wisdom and be full of the Holy Spirit. I speak feelingly, beloved brethren, but in recent times there may have been occasions when administrative acts might have given the enemy a handle. This situation was sectional, it was partisan; and I think, beloved brethren, one thing we can be assured of is that nothing on that line finds its source in the Holy Spirit. We are not actually told here exactly what happened, but a potentially dangerous situation was retrieved by persons who had wisdom and were full of the Holy Spirit. So at the end it says the word of God increased and the number of disciples in Jerusalem was very greatly multiplied. The enemy was defeated. The apostles laid their hands on these persons and they prayed. The matter of prayer and dependency is never to be far from any one of us. But the result was that the enemy was defeated and the testimony was strengthened.

We have Stephen in chapter 7. He was one of the seven appointed to look into that administrative matter. One feature I would draw attention to in Stephen is that he was a faithful man. In his address to the children of Israel previous to where we read, he pointed out to them time and time again that they opposed that which was of God. And he skilfully brought it right up to date and showed that in the rejection of the Lord Jesus they had proved themselves to be stiff necked and unbelieving. That was a witness, a faithful witness, of Stephen. That is another feature, I believe, that marks persons where the Holy Spirit is free, faithfulness. He was full of the Holy Spirit and he

looked up to heaven. I think, beloved brethren, that we can see a fresh step forward in Stephen here. There was that which persons could take account of here as a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. "This which ye behold and hear" (Acts 2: 33), Peter says, was the result of the Holy Spirit, but Stephen looked upward, paving the way, I think, for the heavenly ministry of the apostle Paul. He looked up there and in a time of suffering he had the full support of what there was in heaven at that time. The One who was here stood there. It says that, "having fixed his eyes on heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God". That lowly despised man was now in the position of power and authority; and Stephen proved all the weight of that in the time of his need, in looking up to heaven. But what he tells them is that he saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. That is, the Son of Man was there available for all those whom he had addressed, all those who had rejected what he had said, on the basis of repentance. Another thing I would like to draw attention to that marked Stephen was that he went out in the same spirit as his Master. The Lord Jesus, you will remember, said "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do", Luke 23: 34. Stephen says here, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". What a spirit! A person full of the Holy Spirit, which produced in him the spirit of Christ; the Spirit of the lowly Man, the spirit of the Man of Philippians 2. That is another feature that is seen in a Man that is full of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 9, Ananias is not one who is said to be full of the Holy Spirit but he was sent to Saul of Tarsus that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit. So I think it would be right so say that Ananias moved in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord had prepared that vessel. Saul of Tarsus had just been converted, the Lord had prepared Ananias and He told him to go to Saul of Tarsus and the first thing that he said to him was "Saul, brother". The contrast was that Saul of Tarsus had breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, v: 1. That was the spirit of the religious world. Ananias comes and says "Saul, brother". It is the spirit that prevails in the Christian circle. I think it made a profound impression upon Paul, what was to be found in the local assembly. That which he had never experienced before - "Saul, brother". "There fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he saw, and rising up was baptised". I suppose the first thing he saw was Ananias. And no doubt that left an indelible impression upon Paul. He stayed certain days at Damascus. Then "he preached Jesus, that *he* is the Son of God". I do not think it was given to anybody else at that time to

preach Jesus that He is the Son of God. I do not think Peter preached that aspect of the gospel but it was given to Paul to preach about another Man in another world. Another thing that marks a person full of the Holy Spirit is the power to open up a heavenly order of things and of which Christ is the centre.

In chapter 11, subsequent to the martyrdom of Stephen, Christians were scattered away from Jerusalem, apart from the apostles, and there were those who preached to no one but Jews alone. "But there were certain of them, Cyprians and Cyreneans, that entering into Antioch spoke to the Greeks also". That was outside of the confines of Israel. It was something entirely new, a remarkable thing. And such a remarkable thing reached the ears of the assembly in Jerusalem, the apostles; and they sent out Barnabas. He is the next person who is said to be a good man and full of the Holy Spirit. He goes along there and he rejoices in the grace of God. He rejoiced in the work of God that was apparent outside the confines of Israel. I think the Holy Spirit would promote feelings in us so that we value the work of God; value the work of God in one another; value it wherever it may appear. Then he exhorted with all purpose of heart to abide with the Lord. He exhorted them to keep near the Lord. I think that is the promptings of the Holy Spirit: keep the saints near the Lord. Barnabas came and he established them. He strengthened them. All these features stem, I think, from the activity of the Holy Spirit. Another remarkable thing about Barnabas is that, when he saw the greatness of the work, he did not try to do it all himself, he went out to Tarsus to find Saul. There was no spirit of rivalry with Barnabas. He knew there was one that he needed to help him and he unselfishly went and sought him out. These are things, dear brethren, that find their source in the Holy Spirit. Paul was brought into Antioch and so it was with them that for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd. You think of the effect of a whole year under the teaching of two men who were said to be full of the Holy Spirit. What was the effect? They were first called Christians at Antioch. That is, that the teaching that found its source in the Holy Spirit produced Christ-like features in those that sat under the sound of that ministry. If you read chapter 13, you have a list of persons at the beginning of that chapter who were at Antioch; and there is no suggestion of rivalry with them, none whatsoever. They worked together, and such was the freedom of the Holy Spirit that it says that "the Holy Spirit said, Separate me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" v: 1,2.

Somebody must have said it, but the point was the Holy Spirit said it. It brings out the freedom and the liberty that the Holy Spirit had in that assembly. I just draw attention to those features that they may be firmly in our minds so that we are helped to identify what finds its source in the Holy Spirit.

Finally, in chapter 13, we have Paul and what we see in him there is that he had discernment so that he was able to expose this false prophet. That is another feature, I think, that marks a person where the Holy Spirit is free: power to expose what is opposed to the testimony. There was this man with the proconsul Sergius Paulus an intelligent man who was interested in the truth, he wanted to hear the word of God. And this man Bar-jesus, a false prophet, seeks to turn him aside. But Paul, “filled with the Holy Spirit, fixing his eyes upon him said, O full of all deceit and all craft: son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness; wilt thou not cease perverting the right path of the Lord?” There was a complete and utter exposure of what the man was and the proconsul was not turned aside, he was secured for the testimony.

That is all I have to say. I find it an exercising thing to make way for the Holy Spirit. But I would suggest, beloved brethren, that we study the features that came out in these persons who were said to be full of the Holy Spirit and take account of what they said. I would suggest that they should be features that become more prominent in you and me, both individually and collectively as we make way for the Holy Spirit.

May God bless the word.

Witney

28 April 2007

