

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 90

September 2014

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THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Alistair M Brown

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I would seek help to draw out from these scriptures the range and variety of some of the services of the Holy Spirit. As we speak of them, we may see something of their precious character and their result, because everything that the Spirit does will have a result. You cannot think of a divine Person acting without a result. The Holy Spirit is a divine Person and His activities certainly have a result. We might also see in these scriptures a progression. We see activities of the Spirit that relate to what is moral; and then to our need, or our weakness; then activities that relate to what is spiritual and to the apprehension and enjoyment of divine things; and finally to the great result in the Spirit and the bride saying "Come". So there is variety and progression in the Spirit's service.

The passage in Galatians 5 presents a fundamental, foundational matter. We never leave behind what is fundamental in Christianity. Christianity has a moral foundation, which is Christ. God's intention is that we should come into line with His foundation. He starts with the foundation He has laid, but then He adds material - you and me. It is poor material in one sense, but God acts through the Holy Spirit to prepare that material to be added in. The Holy Spirit is like the wind that blows where it will (John 3: 8), to awaken the consciences and the hearts of people who are away from God. Through new birth God places some seed in the heart of a person, and then His word is preached so that what is implanted in the seed in new birth might come to light and bear fruit; that conversion might take place. It is presupposed in this passage that God has worked, as a result of which there has been an acknowledgement of sinfulness and repentance before a righteous God, and the soul has gladly laid hold of the fact that God has provided a Saviour. If God

had not provided a Saviour there would be no hope, but He has provided a Saviour and so there is hope. He is acting sovereignly now to bring souls to that Saviour. I believe that God is acting powerfully and sovereignly in a very wide way, securing people for His praise and for His glory forever.

The passage in Galatians has in mind believers, and it is a word of exhortation to them - the apostle is exhorting the Galatians, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall no way fulfil flesh's lust". You maybe thought that "no way" was a modern expression. You find it in the scripture here and the translator's footnote says that it is a very "strong negative": if you walk in the Spirit you will "no way fulfil flesh's lust". The flesh is completely opposed to the activities, desires and objectives of God. That is what the flesh is: it is what is innate in you and me that is acted on by Satan. It is an active matter of opposition to what God desires to do in you and with you. But you will "no way fulfil flesh's lust" if you walk in the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit conveys something of the believer drawing power from that One. It is an inward thought, and supposes that the Spirit is in the believer, which would be normal since it is what God intends. You could say it is the objective and the normal result of the preaching of the gospel - that hearts should receive Christ and be ready to receive the Holy Spirit.

The Galatians had received the Holy Spirit and the apostle was exhorting them to walk in Him; that is to draw the inner spring and source of their life from that blessed One. If they did so, they would in no way fulfil flesh's lusts. There is that within us, acted on by the enemy of our souls and the enemy of God, which is resolutely and implacably opposed to what God would do. God wants to bring us into blessing, liberty and joy, and into relationship with Himself, but there is that in me that is implacably opposed - as the apostle says to the Romans, "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell", chap 7: 18. Although the enemy acts on my flesh and opposes, the Spirit is greater. The enemy is a terrible foe, constantly playing on the flesh in me and inflaming it, but the Spirit is greater. "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world", 1 John 4: 4. The enemy is the prince and the power of the air. He is the

pervading spirit and power of the world. But, “greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” What a comfort that is, what an encouragement that, as believers with the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, you and I have the power and the resource to overcome the flesh in us. It speaks about the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. These two things are opposed one to the other. The whole great moral question of the universe, the question of good and evil, is worked out in the soul of the believer. The two things are opposed to each other - the Spirit and the flesh, what is of God and what is of the enemy.

We might ask ourselves this afternoon, which side am I on? Am I on the side of the Spirit? He would constantly draw me to the One who died for me, my Saviour and Lord. Or am I on the side of the flesh? That is what is opposed to God and opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ. I trust that all of us would firmly align ourselves with the Spirit within us, who is opposed to the influence and activities of the devil and of the flesh. The scripture speaks about those that are “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8: 14), who are not under law. We are not to be in slavery and thralldom to the enemy and to the way that he tries to work in us. As under the power of the Holy Spirit you are not subject to that law. The Spirit in His lowly service leads the believer into liberty, not into law, but into liberty from the power of sin and the flesh and the activities of the enemy.

There is a long list of characteristics by which you might identify the flesh’s work. And then a beautiful list of these nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. They are wonderful and worth going over and thinking about. The fruit of the Spirit would remind us of whatsoever things are true and noble and of good report, Phil 4: 8. The apostle goes on to say that “they that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts”. Crucifixion is final and violent, and the believer has to come to this - each of us has to accept that the flesh in us has to be crucified. It has to be put to death - there is absolutely no doubt about it; but it is with a view to living by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit. The translator indicates in the footnote that it is the standard of the characteristic of walk. It implies what is straightforward and according to the Spirit. If we live

by that One, let us walk by Him. So that there is a great result in testimony as the believer with the Spirit is able to overcome what is of the flesh. The walk of the believer is in the Spirit and according to His rule.

In Galatians, we see the Spirit's service in striving in the believer to displace what is opposed to God and to bring about conditions in us such that we can walk by Him. As I said, this is foundational - if we come through these exercises and identify ourselves firmly and clearly with the Spirit in His activities, give Him room, and seek His help to overcome what is of the flesh within us, we make progress. The Spirit is always there to help the saint in his or her struggle against the flesh. I know a little of it and I am sure that all of us of any age at all know the reality of this, and I simply encourage myself and all of us to lay hold of the help that is in the Spirit and by Him to overcome what is opposed to God and what He is doing.

We read in Romans 8, which is really the Spirit's chapter and well worth going over carefully from that point of view. Here we have not so much a struggle against the flesh - that comes in earlier - but we have the help of the Spirit in our weakness. It is a feature of the Spirit in His grace, that He takes account of felt weakness on the part of a believer; not exactly moral weakness, but felt weakness in doing what is right. I find that a very real thing. Situations arise where I ask myself 'what is the right thing to do here?'. I find I do not really know, but the Spirit is there to join His help to our weakness. The context of these verses is the groaning creation. That is the effect that sin has had on the creation as a whole, and if we are sensitive we will know something of that. Just to be practical, you read about people in Syria, who are being oppressed and attacked. These things affect us in our spirits. You wonder, 'Well, how should I pray about this? I hardly know what to pray for as is fitting'. You think of believers across the Middle East, suffering now. It is a groaning creation and the work of God is under attack in a broad way. How should we pray in these situations? You hardly know how to pray.

There are other situations in which we feel our weakness. Even Moses, a man of God who knew the presence of God, could say “make me now to know thy way”, Exod 33: 13. I think we all come across experiences in our lives and circumstances where we do not know what to do or to say or even what to ask for. In that position the Spirit is there, joining His help to our weakness. A divine Person is taking account of our weakness, and He joins Himself to us. He takes account of the fact that we do not know what to pray for as is fitting. He does not leave us to flounder. “The Spirit itself makes intercessions with groanings which cannot be uttered.” The feelings of a divine Person come into expression in the believer, through the believer, speaking and making intercessions. They are described as ‘groanings’ - inexpressible feelings that cannot be put into words. The Spirit would join His help to our weakness to express with divine wisdom, feeling, understanding and precision, just what is right in a situation in which we do not know what to say and we do not know what to do, but as relying on the Spirit there is help in that. And then it says, “he who searches the hearts”, that is God. He “knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for saints according to God”. This verse suggests that as we call upon the Spirit for help, He gives us spiritual intuition to understand what to say and what to ask for. The Spirit brings God’s mind into a situation. So when we do not know what to do, or what to ask for, in our weakness we ask the Spirit and He comes in and gives expression to what is in God’s mind, because He knows it. This matter is worked out in the believer in whom the Spirit dwells. God’s mind through the Spirit is available to the believer who has asked for the help of the Spirit in his or her weakness. He who searches the hearts looks in and He sees a believer who has gone to the Spirit for help. God sees His own mind acknowledged there, because the Spirit has been given room and is active. God’s mind is given expression to by the Spirit, and God Himself takes account of it. What a blessed service! It is a step on from the Spirit helping us in the struggles of the flesh that we get in Galatians, and also earlier in Romans. Chapter 8 of Romans is the Spirit taking account of an expressed and felt weakness in one who desires to make room for Him but who hardly knows what to do, or what to ask for. The Spirit

comes in and brings in the mind of God and God takes account of that.

We next read from 1 Corinthians. Here is another blessed aspect of the activity of the Holy Spirit. The passage speaks about man's mind and not being able to understand God's things, but that is in the background. In the foreground are the things that God has prepared for those that love Him. They are certainly not in the flesh, that is obvious; neither are they natural, because they are things that have not entered into our hearts. They were not seen with our eyes, we have not heard them with our ears, they have not come into man's heart, but God has prepared these things for them that love Him. You think of God loving His creature, wanting to bring us into blessing, and wanting to bring us into relationship to Himself. Added to that, God has prepared things for those that love Him. Am I a lover of God? Do you love God, dear friend, brother or sister? What a blessed thing it is to love God. If we love God, He has prepared things for us and has revealed them by his Spirit. God has a great pent up store of things that He has prepared for you and others like you who love Him. How is He going to make these things known? You cannot appreciate them or receive them naturally, because you cannot understand them in that way. God gives you His Spirit so that you are able to receive and enjoy and appreciate and live in the things that He has prepared for those that love Him. In this passage, the Spirit is given so that we might appreciate and enjoy the things of God. How wonderful that is. And then it goes on to speak about the depths of God. "The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." It has been said, and rightly so, that the Spirit would search out the depths of God in believers, because receiving the things that God has prepared for those that love Him would bring about depth. It would bring about deep appreciation in the believer of the greatness of the spiritual things that God has prepared. It would also bring about, I believe, a deepening appreciation of the depth to which Christ has been, in order that these things might be brought to us. Christ had to go the way of suffering and death in order to redeem us, because we were lost and far from God. Christ has redeemed us so that we are free from every other claim. He accomplished that wonderful matter by paying the price in His blood,

so that we might be redeemed to God and so that God might begin this wonderful unfolding work to those that love Him. The Spirit in the believer would help us to appreciate the depths that have been fathomed.

This scripture particularly conveys a sense of the substance and the preciousness of the things that God has prepared; they are in His heart, and He has prepared them for those who love Him. He has not stopped there. He has given the Spirit so that we might fully appreciate all these things that proceed from the depths of His heart. It says, “we have received ... the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God”. This scripture is worthy of contemplation. God has given us of His own Spirit, and we have received the Spirit which is of God. That is what God has given to us. Why? Well, certainly to help us to overcome the flesh, and to get through here in a world that is opposed to believers; but also that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God. By the Spirit we can have a foretaste of the greatness of divine things. They go way beyond what comes into the heart of anyone naturally. Think of how impossible it would be for anybody to produce an account even remotely like this through exercising their minds or their imaginations. God has taken up people who were opposed to Him and rejected Him and were involved in the murder of His Son, just to speak simply, and He has blessed them from His heart with immense and eternal blessings. He has in mind to bring people into sonship, to dignify them, to clothe them in the best robe, to give them a ring, and sandals, and all these things and to set them up in a position that they never deserved. That is what God has in mind and He has communicated His mind to us in the Scriptures. Then He makes it real by the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Friend, these things could never come into man’s heart, but they are in God’s heart. And He has written these things down for us to communicate them to us, and He provides the power for enjoying them in His own Spirit. What blessedness! May it lay hold of our hearts.

So that we do not think that all of this is in the air as it were, it speaks about the Spirit teaching. This is another aspect of the

Spirit's activity, that He teaches. How gently He would inculcate things. He would go over things with us because we are slow learners. The Spirit teaches, and He also leads. Galatians refers to the Spirit as leading and teaching. A question for us is whether we are leadable and teachable. Am I such a one as can be led by the Spirit and then taught by the Spirit? If so, the Spirit would love to focus our minds on these wonderful things that God has prepared. He would love to teach them to us, to show us the detail of them, and to show us how they relate to one another. The Spirit wants to convey something to us of what is in God's heart. One of the things in God's heart, that He has prepared for those that love Him, is sonship. The Holy Spirit is absolutely in the matter of sonship, because He is the Spirit of adoption, or of sonship. He helps believers to understand that that is what is in God's mind for us. Even more than that, by indwelling us as the Spirit of adoption, He brings in feelings that are appropriate to the relationship of sonship, and provides power for expressions that convey these feelings. These feelings and expressions are directed to God Himself, because we have come to know Him as Father. These are the Spirit's activities. What a Person He is!

We read in Ephesians 3. What I wanted to draw attention to there was the end of verse 16: "to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man". The apostle Paul was praying to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is infinitely great, that He might give these Ephesian brethren "according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man". What a prayer that was. Paul prayed that the believers in Ephesus would be strengthened inwardly in their spirits by God's Spirit. Why? "that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love". So he wanted them to enjoy that as a result of the Spirit strengthening them - this was something to be enjoyed inwardly, something of Christ Himself in His attractiveness and His glory, dwelling in the hearts of believers, rooted and founded in love there. It was a love that had its origin in Christ Himself, indeed in God Himself. It had been expressed fully in Christ and now the apostle's desire was that there should be an answer in the hearts of

these brethren in Ephesus; no doubt there was an answer. How can it be? By the Holy Spirit strengthening us inwardly, in our hearts.

It is very interesting that the apostle begins with the matter of Christ dwelling through faith in their hearts, rooted and founded in love, and then goes on to a further thought: "That ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height". This takes in the whole sphere of God's revealed mind and His intentions. We speak about His purpose - what He has made known; and His counsel - how it is all worked out from His side. Everything was worked out in Christ, everything was given into His hand, and everything was perfectly accomplished by that blessed One. Then also, the accomplishing of God's purpose has been given into the hands of the Spirit throughout this long Christian era. All the counsel of God has been committed into these safe hands - the hands of the Son and the hands of the Spirit, and all with a view to all the saints apprehending the breadth and length and depth and height, speaking of God's thoughts, His purpose and His counsel. By the Spirit we are strengthened to apprehend these things with all the saints. We discover that there are many others who love God and who love His things and love His purpose and want to know more about them. And we are able by the Spirit to apprehend these things. Notice that it does not say, 'comprehend'. You cannot get your mind around these things, or encompass them; but we "may be fully able to apprehend" them; that is, that we can take account of them in our full measure in their attractiveness and their glory and their perfection. We find ourselves in that sphere, in that area with such a scope. The power of the Spirit, operating in the inner man, enables believers to apprehend these things. What an elevated, gracious, dignified, glorious service that is. And then it says, "that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God"; that is, that there is a vessel here formed as a result of the activity of the Spirit which is fully able to apprehend what is in the heart of God Himself as regards His creature, and to provide a complete answer to it. This is the result of divine purpose from before the world's foundation, being worked out in God's counsels through the whole history of time - although His counsels began before the worlds were. That purpose and these counsels will come to completion, as

it says here, "that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God". God by the operations of the Spirit will complete what is in His purpose.

What we have in the Revelation 22 is a wonderful matter. It is not exactly the service of the Spirit, more the result of His service. It is full and perfect and complete. It is also very simple. The assembly is spoken of here as the bride. She is perfect and complete, and the voice of the Spirit and the voice of the bride are as one. It must come about as human hearts are directed entirely towards the Lord Jesus as the Object. The voice of the Spirit and the voice of the bride say the same thing at the same time to that blessed One. What is expressed? One word - "Come". Think of the depth of feeling that is expressed in that, the depth of desire and longing. It is not a matter of extrication of the bride from a scene of opposition, but the result of complete and affectionate occupation with Christ Himself, and a united desire that His heart might be fully satisfied in the answer from His church, which He has been building for all these centuries. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come." What a wonderful result of the Spirit's service. The assembly is spoken of in another scripture as the pearl, one blessed single entity in perfection and lustre, the product of divine counsel, and secured by the work of the Lord Jesus. She is the product, too, of the blessed service of the Spirit in leading and teaching and adorning. And the expression of longing from that vessel is identical to the feelings of the Holy Spirit. Her expression absolutely synchronises with the expression of the Spirit - a divine Person and a creature vessel saying the same thing at the same time to the Lord Jesus. Wonderful matter! Very soon we will experience the answer in actuality. That will be a tremendous thing. The scripture also speaks of the assembly, the bride, as like the treasure. That is the assembly seen as made up of many individual pieces of great value. In the lives of each saint, you can see how the work and service of the Holy Spirit has been active in relation to the treasure. But it is a whole, it is a blessed whole - a creature vessel that answers to the mind and heart of God, and that fully satisfies Christ's heart as a blessed Man. The Spirit is there, with her, at the end, saying, "Come".

May these things be for our encouragement. May the service of the Spirit and His Person be exalted and enlarged in our hearts and in our minds, so that there might be a greater response to Him and to the Lord too. For the Lord's Name's sake.

Kirkcaldy

8th February 2014

“TO YOU IN THE ASSEMBLIES”

Bob Gray

Revelation 1: 8-11; 22: 16-21

Both the hymn and the prayer were an encouragement in relation to my exercise and brought to mind in the Lord's word as to Himself, “I am the Alpha and the Omega”; these are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. When the Lord says it of Himself it has some outstanding significance. The Alpha, I suggest, represents what was set out in Christ when He came in, the beginning. The freshness and beauty of God's thoughts in purpose really came into relief when the Lord Jesus appeared in this scene and took up His place in flesh and blood conditions. It was all there. God's thoughts were vested in that One; they were perfect in every way. But then we have the Omega. We may say this simply means 'the end', but it means much more than that. What it suggests to me is this that we have all that the Alpha speaks of, God's purpose set out in its glory and fulness in Christ, but also God's ways, that is the way that God has brought glory to Himself by filling out and carrying out every single word of what He says through the prophets, through the Lord Himself, through the apostles, “I am the Alpha and the Omega”. The fact that the Lord Jesus is in heaven and is seated at the Father's right hand is proof that everything that God has set on in purpose is and will be fulfilled without any detail missing. No one will speak after Him: no one has anything to add after our Lord Jesus. 'Now', you say, 'that is very fine', and it is fine, but where do we see it today?

I read at the end of this remarkable book because I think it is a present word to us. I was thinking of this section, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies”. Where we read at the beginning we had seven assemblies named. They are not named here: it is “to you in the assemblies”. What is looked at here is the saints, persons who are of that character, and it is a question that has been in my own mind, 'Am I of the assembly?'. You may say, 'I have broken bread for all these years and there have been many exercises', but it is not like a badge or a qualification: “to

you in the assemblies” is to persons who know and love Christ and understand the feelings of His heart. Now this has pressed on me a little because the idea of the assembly itself is not set out distinctively, as in Ephesus or Pergamos or whatever, as at the beginning of Revelation. It is “to you in the assemblies” that is, where saints are found formed after the assembly and have the truth of the assembly; those are they to whom the Lord is speaking.

So it says here, “I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come”. I just want to dwell on this a little because we have been brought into liberty. Not many here will remember it now, but I remember when I was young when the thought of addressing the Spirit was first raised among the brethren; it caused much soul searching and exercise. But it is an essential part of the testimony, that the Holy Spirit should be given His place in worship, not exactly prominently - the Lord is the Centre of things - and also that but He should be brought more fully into the consciousness and affections of the brethren as a power and known as a Person. I think the fact that it is John who says, “I beheld the Spirit descending as a dove” (John 1: 32), would impress on our minds and hearts the thought that this is a divine Person, not an influence only: this is a Person who has the rights of a divine Person and the power of a divine Person, and is worthy of our worship. Now, it is that Person who says, “Come”, but He is not saying it alone; “the Spirit and the bride say, Come”. ‘Well’, you say, ‘that is fine, we know all this’, and that may well be so; I trust it is. But what flows out of this? “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely”. What that suggests to me is that the truth of the assembly, and the truth and maintenance of the gospel, are inextricably bound up. We have had much entrusted to us in the way of assembly truth, assembly light. Do not forget the gospel. Let us pursue the gospel in these difficult, dark days. Certainly evangelical work is of God, but do not forget the assembly either. They stand together. Now, I want to be wise in what I say but I have the impression that the truth of Christ and the assembly is under attack. This matter of marriage is much before us - the Lord grant us wisdom here - but when Paul spoke of marriage

he said, "but / speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly", Eph 5: 32. And the representation of that in marriage in households set up according to God is an essential part of the constitution of the assembly and the present testimony, as it always was indeed. We cannot have the idea - and it is so insidious and so subtle - we cannot have the idea that belongs in Christendom that we will water things down, not much, just a little: this stands, "/ speak as to Christ, and as to the assembly". Now, Paul linked that directly with the illustration of husband and wife. The households of the saints are an essential and indestructible part of what constitutes assembly life and assembly walk. The Lord is speaking here, and the scripture speaks earlier of "they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and that they should go in by the gates into the city. Without are the other persons, dogs, fornicators", and so on. Along with this, there goes the necessity not to have indistinct or blurred ideas of what constitutes the assembly and assembly life. There are things that are within and, according to God, marriage in the Lord is one of these things. There are things that are without and are not of God, and they are better left. In fact, it is essential that they should be left, "... every one that loves and makes a lie". In the presence of that the Lord speaks, and says, "/": "/, Jesus". The Lord has not given up one thing; He has not relinquished His rights. I speak with great reverence. He has not grown weary of the truth nor of the dispensation, which is in grace. It says in the type, "he bore them and carried them all the days of old", Isa 63: 9. What a Saviour! What a high Priest we have! What a One who loves us and has secured us at such cost! And He tells us things to cheer us on our way, "/ Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies. / am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star". We would be helped as we look to Him. You may say, 'We address the Saviour as the Lord Jesus, we remember Him in the breaking of bread'. That is good, but special times require special committal, and I think, brethren, we are in a special time, that is as the enemy sees the end - and I speak carefully - the enemy is not foolish. He knows what is coming perfectly well, he knows the Scriptures, he sees things heading up, and what is he doing? He will spoil what is for Christ at any price. It

lies with us to go back to Philadelphia, “hold fast what thou hast”, Rev 3: 11. You say again, 'We have heard that from the beginning'. Yes, and I believe that the Lord would say that to us with more and more clarity. “He that has an ear, let him hear”: let your ear be attuned, let mine be. “I am ... the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.”

I trust what is said will be of profit. The Lord loves the assembly; He is jealous of it; He cares for it. Let us not in any sense tarnish what belongs to Christ and the assembly.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

Grangemouth

4th March 2014

THE PRESERVATION OF LIFE

David J Wright

John 17: 6-20; 21: 15-17

Acts 20: 7-12

I would like to say a word with the Lord's help, dear brethren, about the preservation of life and how it is brought about.

What I firstly call attention to in this first Scripture in John 17 is the living, intercessory service of Christ. What we owe to that we shall never fathom, and it is going on today. This is a remarkable scripture, a unique scripture, because it is the record of a prayer by one divine Person to another; the Lord Jesus still had not died but He was looking on to the time of His death, His resurrection, and ascension. He ever lives to make intercession for us, Heb 7: 25. I think this chapter is very touching. You can tell from the way things are actually said - the deep affection that the Lord Jesus had for His own. One thing I would point out, dear brethren, is how He took account of those men who were given to Him. They were the Father's; and had been given to Him by the Father. That would greatly elevate them in His mind and affections. We are perhaps familiar with the idea of divine ownership: we speak about the aspect of God's creatorial rights, and how every breath is in His hand; and He is a faithful Creator. And we look also from the aspect of His redemptive rights, that He has shed His precious blood - therefore "ye are not your own ... for ye have been bought with a price", 1 Cor 6: 19-20. But we may not have thought sufficiently about *this* aspect of divine ownership because it relates, I think, to God's purpose, That is, these men were given to the Lord Jesus and He had a real conscious sense that they had been given to Him by the Father: they belonged to Him. The first thing He says in what I read is, "I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world". He had made the Father's Name known. He could say elsewhere, "He that has seen me has seen the Father", John 14: 9. If you read John 13 to 17, you cannot fail to be impressed with the way He had been a father to those disciples. That is why they could not contemplate being without Him. When He spoke of the way He

would die, and go out of this scene by way of the cross, they dismissed it from their minds. So here He says, "I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world. They were thine, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word". You might say, if you read the gospels and their account of the disciples, that it was generous to say they had kept His word, but the Lord Jesus had perfect knowledge of them. What He said to the Father about them here was vindicated in the Acts. There were one hundred and twenty in the upper room who were the direct fruit of the Lord's own ministry, and they were vessels that were suitable for the Holy Spirit to come upon, and to launch this dispensation of grace in which we have our part at the end. Everything that the Lord Jesus wrought was perfect. Have you ever thought that the work of God in you is perfect? It is indestructible. It is possible for it to get hidden by other things that come in, but it is there and can be appealed to. I think it is fair to say that the disciples answered to the Lord's words. They needed adjustment, like we all do, but it is evident - particularly in Peter - that they were amenable to adjustment. Dear brethren, that is part of our preservation; that our wills are subdued to His, and amenable to adjustment as Peter was. I will come back to Peter later.

He says, "I demand concerning them; I do not demand concerning the world, but concerning those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine". Now, take note of that word "demand". It is quite a strong word, and I believe it reflects the feelings He had in relation to His own: "I **demand** concerning them; I do not demand concerning the world", but what was precious to Him was His own. He never forgot the sense that they were the Father's. They became His but they never ceased to be the Father's. So He is anticipating in this chapter: "I am no longer in the world". That is the present position, He is no longer here, "and these are in the world". His concern is such for them that He commits them with such affection into the hand of the Father. He would no longer be here, but He also impressed the disciples that, if He did not go away, the Comforter would not come to them. I think of that: our best Friend in heaven is the Lord Jesus, He takes care of our affairs there; our best Friend here is the Holy Spirit - a wonderful system of support. What love

lay behind such an inauguration of a system like that! "When I was with them", He says, "I kept them in thy name; those thou hast given me I have guarded, and not one of them has perished, but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled": what a perfect shepherd service of the Lord Jesus. "As to those whom thou hast given me, I have not lost one of them" (John 18: 9) - "but the son of perdition". "I have given them thy word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, as I am not of the world". That was the effect of the Lord's words upon the disciples. Can it be said of you and me that we are "not of the world"? Can we be taken account of as such? The world has crucified Christ, crucified my Saviour. That determines my pathway here, and keeping near Him in such a scene where evil abounds is my salvation. It is yours too. "I do not demand that thou shouldest take them out of the world" - if He took them out of the world, there would be no testimony. The enemy is dead set against the expression of Christ here, but we are to be here as a testimony to Him. But He says, "that thou shouldest keep them out of evil". What a moral triumph that is, in the world of evil through which we pass, that we are kept from it. What a moral triumph! What a testimony is open to us. Then He says, "Sanctify them by the truth: thy word is truth"; "as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph 4: 21); "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", John 14: 6. You might ask 'How does the truth sanctify you?'. I think the truth sanctifies you by practising it. That means that you come out in features that are seen in Jesus. He says, "As thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world". In chapter 20, we see that He breathed into them, and He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v 22), and then He sent them out: they went out in the Spirit of Christ. "I do not demand for these only, but also for those who believe on me through their word": what a comfort that is - He is not only speaking about the disciples here; He is bringing it right down to the present day, to you and to me, if you are one who believes on Him.

In Exodus 28, we get the breastplate, and the names were on the breastplate when Aaron went in. Our true high Priest goes in, and He bears your name before the Father. There are no generalities: your name is on the breastplate. That means that you are in His affections - how much we owe to the present intercessory

service of Christ on high! May we value Him increasingly in that way!

Now, I come on to Peter. Speaking reverently, the Lord Jesus had a lot of investment in Peter, but he was one who had a lot of failures. I suppose the failures of the twelve in the gospels are most seen in relation to Peter. At one time, when Peter sought to turn Him aside from the pathway of the will of God, the Lord said, "Get away behind me, Satan", Matt 16: 23. He said to Peter, "Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat", Luke 22: 31. Do you think you are an exception? But then He goes on to say, "but I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not". It was not that he would not fail, but that his faith should not fail. If your faith fails, dear brother or sister, you are left to drift without an object for your affections, an object for your faith. He says to Peter, "when once thou hast been restored, **confirm** thy brethren". I think Peter did that in his epistles; he confirmed the brethren. He says, "the putting off of my tabernacle is speedily to take place", but, "I account it right, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up" (2 Pet 1: 13, 14) by bringing to mind the experience he had on the holy mountain. Now, we all know that, in the gospels, Peter did not shine on that occasion; he spoke about "three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Luke 9: 33), and a cloud overshadowed them. Peter is at the end of his life and he is thinking now about departing from this scene, but he says, 'I want to leave you with this impression'. There is no mention of the three tabernacles; he speaks about the "holy mountain"; that is, he has a real sense of the divine presence. And he speaks about "the excellent glory", and the Father's voice: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight", 2 Pet 16-18. All this was confirming the brethren once he had been restored. But remember this also, dear brethren, that, despite the failures, the Lord never changed His mind about "first, Simon, who was called Peter", Matt 10: 2. Peter was a vessel that showed that he was amenable to adjustment, and to my mind, dear brethren, that is the sign of spirituality: let our wills be subdued to His. There is a sobering thing in Scripture in relation to the elder son in Luke 15: the father went out and besought him (v 28) - think of the affection that lay behind that, that he might come into the house, where his brother had come

home, was dead and had come to life again - and he would not: his will was at work. I feel for myself that we must ever be preserved from our self will and be subject to His will. You will find that His will is best.

Well, now we come to the verses I have read. Peter, in the earlier part of the chapter, had gone back to his fishing, and he took six others with him. It was an independent movement. I think it is beautiful to see the way the Lord Jesus restores him in this chapter. He does not do it immediately; He sets on something to eat, and says, "Come and dine", v 12. He builds up Peter's constitution; and then He probes him about his love for Him. He knew of course that Peter loved Him, but He is about to give him his commission and He wants to have Peter's will subdued: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He says to him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I am attached to thee. He says to him, Feed my lambs." Lambs are young ones; it is good to see many of them here today. "Feed my lambs": what would Peter feed them on? He would feed them on his impressions of Christ. That is what will build up their spiritual constitution - the little ones need it; we all need it. I wonder sometimes if I have thought sufficiently of the effect of my behaviour upon the lambs. If the sheep go astray, the lambs will. The lambs are always where the sheep are, so that places a responsibility on me as being a little older. The apostle places a responsibility on Timothy as he is about to pass off this scene, but he knew the qualities in Timothy. He says, "For I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on", Phil 2: 20. Timothy is a man for the last days. Have the saints that place in your affections, that you care with genuine feeling how they get on? Paul took account of Timothy's tears, and he says that he would "put you in mind of my ways as they are in Christ", 1 Cor 4: 17. It was not only a question of passing on Paul's doctrine but his ways, and he reminded them of the spirit of the apostle.

So He says the same thing the second time, and He asks similarly in relation to his love; then He says, "Shepherd my sheep". There is no reference to shepherding the lambs: if the sheep are right, the lambs will be. What a Shepherd the Lord was to His own

when here. And then the third time, it is similar probing, and Peter was grieved. Jesus says, "Feed my sheep". That was Peter's commission; and then, as I say, in his epistles he stirs them up in relation to his impressions of Christ on the holy mountain. He says, "For ye were going astray as sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls", 1 Pet. 2: 25. Now there is a little word that comes in here and it has just two letters - "my": "Feed **my** lambs", "Shepherd **my** sheep", "Feed **my** sheep". If you cast your mind back to John 17, it had had a profound effect - speaking reverently - upon the Lord Jesus, that those that had been given to Him were the Father's; and I think it would have had a profound effect on Peter that the sheep he had been given were not his; they belonged to the Lord, and therefore they were precious. I think it elevated them in Peter's mind. So I think Peter, being amenable to adjustment, was usable of the Lord under His hand. Think of how he could preach so powerfully in Acts 2 in the very place where, days earlier, his Saviour had been crucified; in the very place where he had denied Him thrice, but just a look from the Lord was enough for him to weep bitterly, Luke 22: 61. In the very same place, he gets up when it was not just historic but a current event, and with courage and with power says: "God has made him, this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ", Acts 2: 36. Think of the power of those words: three thousand souls were converted. The Lord did not give up on Peter, and I am thankful He has not given up on me either - or you - but He used him effectively.

Well, when we come to Acts 20, there is a certain climax to the book. The chapter starts with the way that Paul embraces the disciples. The chapter ends by saying, "they all wept sore; and falling upon the neck of Paul they ardently kissed him, specially pained by the word which he had said, that they would no more see his face", v 37, 38. He had gained a place in their affections; for three years he "ceased not night and day admonishing each one of them with tears", v 31. In the middle of the chapter, we get Eutychus and the embrace of Paul. This chapter has been referred to as "first love", and we know that Ephesus fell from it and publicly that has never been restored; but the ingredients of the original are brought through, I think, in Philadelphia in a remnant. Philadelphia means

'brotherly love'. So they were assembled to break bread. Paul puts the Supper in an assembly setting. If we are left here until tomorrow morning, we will come up and partake of the Lord's supper. I am thankful that it is every week, because every time we look on those emblems, it is a fresh reminder to me of the strength of the love of Jesus for me, that the body that was prepared for Him He was prepared to give up in death. And, in the cup, His love for me was such that He was prepared to shed His precious blood in order that I might be redeemed, and forgiven for my sins. Each week, we have the gospel preaching. The subject is Jesus; another fresh reminder to us of the extent of His love in dying for us! You hear of some people who say they do not need to go to the gospel any more because they are saved. But I think that occasion, and the Supper, week by week, are used to keep our affections for Christ fresh. It has that effect upon us, upon me, that we are set to be here for His interests.

But Eutychus was here, and there were many lights in the upper room; there were those there who were prepared to support the line of ministry that Paul was bringing in. And there was Eutychus sitting by the window opening, a dangerous place to be: he could see what was going on outside and what was inside. And eventually he was overpowered by a deep sleep and he fell from the third story down to the bottom, and was taken up dead. But Paul descended, and fell upon him. He enfolded him in his arms, and he said, "his life is in him". How did he know his life was in him, when nobody else seemed to? Because he was the closest to him and embraced him. "They took away the boy alive and were no little comforted". What I would say to the young people here - and it is good to see so many, and the interest there is - is, do not stay by the window opening; come right in: come right in. You say there are certain exercises and sorrows; sadly that is so. But remember this: the enemy only attacks what is worth attacking, and conflict will go on to the end. But there is safety in coming out into the circle of light, and in experiencing the circle of affection. And let those of us who are older take on responsibility that that atmosphere is preserved in each of our local assemblies. I suppose the aspect of this service is very largely Merarite, which means care for one

another. It means that we do not need gift for it; but what you *do* need is love for the Lord Jesus, and love for His own. And John makes abundantly clear in his teaching that the two go together.

Well, I desire to stimulate myself and perhaps others in relation to God's inheritance which is in the saints.

May it be preserved, and may God bless the word.

Warrenpoint

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THE SPIRIT OF THE GLAD TIDINGS

Paul A Gray

Luke 15: 1-32

I would like, with the Lord's help, to say something about the spirit of the glad tidings. The gospel according to Luke is the priestly gospel, as we have been taught, and it also has in mind, in a particular way, the securing of praise to God. In Psalm 22 there is an ascription to God, "And thou art holy, thou that dwellest amid the praises of Israel" (v 3), and Luke's gospel brings out that while Israel had departed from God, there was nevertheless a remnant who became available in whom God could secure the praises of Israel. And these praises are secured in persons who are brought in as the fruit of the gospel in view of God being served. So, at the end of Luke's gospel, it says, "*they* ... were continually in the temple praising and blessing God", chap 24: 52, 53. The outgoing of the glad tidings has in mind that persons should be secured for God's glory in time and in eternity.

But the spirit of the gospel is, I believe, to imbue us in our dealings with one another as well as with unbelievers. It is not something that we put on when we are speaking to unbelievers and take off again when we are dealing with one another. The spirit of the glad tidings is intrinsic, I suggest, to the service of priesthood as it comes out in Luke's gospel. Mr Darby says in his poem 'The Man of Sorrows', speaking of the Lord:

Priests, that should plead for weakness,
Must Thine accusers be!

It is not the task of the priest to be an accuser: Satan has taken that for himself. It is the task of the priest to intercede in things relating to God, putting God first, putting God's rights first, but "being able to exercise forbearance towards the ignorant and erring", Heb 5: 2. So in our dealings with one another, as with men generally, the spirit of the gospel ought to be intrinsic to what we do.

Now, this chapter, Luke 15, is often used in the preaching of the gospel and rightly so. However, it would remind us, in looking at

it, that each of these three examples, the sheep and the coin and the younger son, were already within the boundaries of the house of God. They really speak of persons who were saved and then got away. So you find in Leviticus 14 “the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing”, v 2. Now, the leper was someone who was in the camp, an Israelite, upon whom leprosy came, and then he was to be cleansed. I say this because if we identify something in a believer that needs to be taken up and dealt with, they are still a believer. That is their place and that is not lost to them. I say this also, beloved brethren: if I identify a problem in someone else, the first thing I need to do is to look at myself. The first thing I must do is to judge in myself whatever it may be I see in another because - I speak from my own experience - it is likely that there is more amiss with me than there is with my brother. Indeed, I have heard it said in the preaching: if you can look round the room at the gospel preaching and see a worse sinner than yourself, you do not know what your own heart is capable of. So we approach these things from the standpoint of self-judgment.

“The Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them”. Well, they were sinners too. “And all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near to him to hear him”, and what a blessing to come near to Christ to hear Him! And He did not turn round and say, ‘Well, you are a tax-gatherer and you are a sinner’. He spoke to them of the grace of God. You think of this, “the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared” (Tit 2: 11), and how did it appear? It appeared in Christ in all its glory, and He spoke to them of the grace of God. Think of grace carrying with it salvation! Grace does not overlook the deficiency; grace does not turn aside in respect of evil; but grace meets the need. It identifies it and it meets it.

If you look at the man on the Jericho road spoken of in Luke 10, whose fault was it that he was there? It was his own! He was to blame. He “descended from Jerusalem to Jericho”, Luke 10: 30. He made that choice; as far as Scripture records nobody made him do it; he did it himself; it was his own will. And the priest came along,

and in that setting, I suppose, the priest was the one who would know the law, and he looked at that man and said, 'There is nothing in the law that can help this man', and he "passed on on the opposite side", v 31. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, having sent his own Son, in likeness of flesh of sin, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh", Rom 8: 3. But the priest could not do that. He said, 'This case is too difficult for the law to meet'. Our hymn, 'Rock of Ages!', confesses:

Not the labour of my hands
Could fulfil the law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
Nought for sins could e'er atone
But Thy blood, and Thine alone.
(Hymn 396)

The priest passed by.

And then the Levite - now in that setting I suppose we could think of the Levite as someone who was used to carrying things. I know that at the time the parable was given the literal movements of the ark of the testimony were no longer, but the task of the Levite was to carry certain burdens, and he looked at this man and he said, 'I cannot carry this burden' and he "passed on on the opposite side", v 32.

"But a certain Samaritan journeying came up to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine", v 34. Where was the Samaritan going? Scripture does not tell us. It just says he was "journeying", but he had oil and he had wine. Perhaps he was going to sell them. But, 'No', he said, 'I am not going to use them for my own good. I will use them for this man'. Each of us, beloved brethren, who has the Spirit has something that we can use in the service of others, and that is the spirit of the gospel, that which we can use in the service of others. The Samaritan "bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine". It does not say he took out a little measure and dropped it on the wound; he poured it; and then he put the man on his own beast. He said, 'I will walk so that you can be comfortable', and he "took him to the inn and took care of him", and

then he gave the innkeeper two denarii and asked him to look after him and he said, "whatsoever thou shalt expend more, / will render to thee on my coming back". He did everything for that man who had nothing to offer, and nothing to give, and had got himself into the place of difficulty as a result of the exercise of his own will.

The Lord did that for me; and for each one here who has trusted in Him, He did that for you; and if you have not trusted in Him, He has done it for you if you will but put your faith and trust in Him. The Lord says, through the psalmist, "then I restored that which I took not away", Ps 69: 4. If exercises come up amongst us, and they do, remember this: "then I restored that which I took not away". No, beloved brother, beloved sister, you did not cause the exercise; it was not your fault; but do not dwell on that: "then I restored that which I took not away". What can you do? What can you bring? What can you offer?

So these three incidents are brought before us in chapter 15. "What man of you having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" One of the things about divine calculation is that it is not the same as natural calculation. In natural calculation, if one per cent of what you had was gone, why would you put yourself at risk when you still had ninety-nine per cent of it? I do not know how far this sheep had gone. I do not know the difficulties of the terrain that had to be crossed in order to find it. "Having lost one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost". Some things might not be said on the face of the page here, but they strike me. It says he went after it. Perhaps it was still running away, but he goes after it anyway. And then He says, "until he find it". He does not give up until he found it. And then He says, "and having found it, he lays it upon his own shoulders, rejoicing"; not complaining about how far the sheep had gone, or how many rocks he had had to climb over to reach it. Perhaps the sheep, having run away, was quite satisfied with where it was. Sometimes we speak about how sad the sheep must have been, and certain circumstances are implied, for example that it was raining and it was cold. But it is also possible that the

sheep was quite happy where it was, but he picked it up anyway and he brought it back, and he was rejoicing. He is so glad to have this sheep back that he makes no comment about the distance he had had to travel or the weight of the sheep that he had to carry back. He just brings it back, rejoicing. And then when he arrives home he "calls together the friends and the neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep". The Lord would say, beloved, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep". There is no account given of what it cost to find this lost sheep; the account is given elsewhere. "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him" (2 Cor 5: 21): that is sin. "Who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet 2: 24): that is sins. Sin condemned and sins accounted for and borne, and the Lord does not say, 'Look at what I did'; He says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep. I say unto you, that thus there shall be joy in heaven for one repenting sinner, more than for ninety and nine righteous who have no need of repentance". I say this in passing: I have never met anyone who had no need of repentance. I know I do, daily. I know I do. And if we approach one another on the basis that I have need of repentance, how much simpler things become.

And then we come down to a smaller compass: "Or, what woman having ten drachmas, if she lose one drachma," - one in ten - "does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek carefully till she find it?" She is diligent. You think of the diligence of the Holy Spirit which is suggested here. This drachma is not even out of the house, but it is out of circulation, and she lights a lamp. The truth has its own power. She lights a lamp and she sweeps the house. Something has come in that has overshadowed this drachma. How easy it is to become covered over with something else, but if we see a brother or a sister who is out of circulation, covered over with something else, can we light a lamp and "seek carefully"? That is to say, she does not just look superficially, but she is careful, careful not to cause more disturbance, careful not to lose any of the other drachmas while she is looking for this one. She seeks carefully. Perhaps the drachma is in quite an obscure place. Do you ever find that when you have lost something, that it has ended up somewhere

quite obscure, and you do not know how it got there? It may be that you are not sure where somebody is in their soul. Seek carefully! Do not assume that a thing is so or not so. Seeking carefully involves that we do not make assumptions. Many things could be resolved, beloved brethren, if we did not make assumptions. This brother thinks one thing and that brother thinks another thing. Do they? Do you know? Have you spoken to them? Seek carefully!

Mostly brethren agree about most things. We agree about Christ. We agree about the place that God has given Him. We agree that we needed a Saviour. We agree that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, Eph 1: 4. We agree that the Lord asked us to remember Him in the breaking of bread. We agree about these things. Well, we can speak about these things. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable, whatsoever things are of good report" (Phil 4: 8): we can speak about these things. But if someone is out of circulation, seek carefully.

"And having found it she calls together the friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the drachma which I had lost". This reminds us of what is complete. The hundred sheep and the ten drachmas speak of what is complete. I say, in passing, to everyone here, you are needed in order that what is for God might be complete. You are not too insignificant to matter. The Lord Jesus died for you, not for a group of people, not for a mass of persons. He died for you, and you matter, and there is a place for you. There is a place for you, and it is your place, and nobody else can fill it. It is for you. "Thus, I say unto you, there is joy before the angels of God for one repenting sinner". You think of the angels looking on. This is part of "the all-various wisdom of God" (Eph 3: 10) that the angels can take account of. "The all-various wisdom of God" comes into the matter of recovery and restoration.

And then there is the man who had two sons. Now this, I am sure, is one of the best-known passages of Scripture, speaking of the younger son, the prodigal, the one who went away. But what about the man who had the two sons? What did he do? Well, he

gave the younger son what he asked for. Remember the scripture as to Israel of old. It says, God “gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul”, Psalm 106: 15. Sometimes God will give you what you ask for in order to teach you that it is not what you should have. Have you ever thought of that, because God wants you for Himself? He does not want you for your will. He wants you for His.

So the father gives the younger son what he asks for, and he goes away and squanders it. He just spends it on his own pleasure, and then it all runs out. Now, what arose was a violent famine and, if you have time, and I think if you can you should make time, read the series of readings in Mr Taylor’s ministry called ‘Famines and their Lessons’, vol 16. You might think that famines are not very interesting, but it is very interesting and well worth reading. Here we have “a violent famine”. What does that mean? It means that it was sudden and it had a high impact. Perhaps something happens in your life that is sudden and has a high impact. That is God speaking to you. It is not just an accident. But it says, “coming to himself”. How does that happen? Well, he realised, of course, that the circumstances he was in were unpleasant. There was a land of famine, and he was feeding swine, which were unclean animals, and the only thing that he might have eaten were the husks that the swine ate, and no-one would even offer him these. The world will take everything you have got and it will not offer you anything in return. Just be clear about that! But he came to himself. That is really the result of divine power working. He came to himself. “And coming to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have abundance of bread, and I perish here by famine? I will rise up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants”. Even when we are far away, sometimes we would like to come back on our own terms. We only come back on God’s terms, and they are better than ours. One of the things about the spirit of the gospel is this: it does not dilute the requirements of God’s righteousness, because they have been met on the cross by Christ. The requirements of God’s righteousness were met in the shed blood of Christ, and the

requirements of His holiness were met in His sufferings on the cross, and, therefore, the spirit of the glad tidings does not dilute the rights of God. There is no need to, because they have been met entirely. The spirit of the gospel is not the dilution of divine principles; the spirit of the gospel involves the maintenance of them.

So this young man came to himself, and he wanted to set the terms on which he would come back, but then he rose up. Now, there is an interesting word in this first sentence of verse 20: "And he rose up and went to his own father" - his *own* father. If you have got away from God, he is still your own Father and I say this, brethren: if a brother or a sister gets away or does something wrong, the love of God for them has not changed and neither has ours. "He rose up and went to his own father." That love remained the same. Now, his father did not go into the far country, into the place of wickedness, "But while he was yet a long way off". You know, beloved brethren, if one rises up to turn round, that is enough for God. The distance, and the far country, and all the wickedness connected with it, none of these things are ever mentioned again. He rose up to turn round, and his father ran.

If you look at the times when haste comes into Scripture, sometimes it is negative, but there are positive ones too, and if the father ran, we can be sure that he was not going to let this opportunity pass. Look at the end of Numbers 16, "And the whole assembly of the children of Israel murmured on the morrow against Moses and Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of Jehovah", v 41. Now, Moses and Aaron had done what was right. They had dealt with wickedness, and yet there was an objection to it. "And it came to pass, when the assembly was gathered together against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of Jehovah appeared", v 42. God endorsed what they had done. "And Moses and Aaron went before the tent of meeting. And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Get you up from the midst of this assembly, and I will consume them in a moment", v 43-45. They had objected to Moses and Aaron upholding the rights of God, and God said, 'I will deal with them'. "And they [Moses and Aaron] fell on their faces", v 45. Did

they say, 'Judgment is going to come on these people - so we will take ourselves out of the way'? No! "And Moses said to Aaron, Take the censer, and put fire thereon from off the altar, and lay on incense, and carry it quickly to the assembly, and make atonement for them; for there is wrath gone out from Jehovah: the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses had said, and ran into the midst of the congregation", v 46, 47. It was the fault of the congregation; they had murmured; wrath went out righteously; and Aaron "ran". Think of that! One could say that it would be undignified for such a man as the high priest to run. But no! He ran. He said, 'I know that the wrath of God is righteous, but the most must be saved, and, for the most to be saved, I am going to run'. That is in the Old Testament, but it is still the spirit of the glad tidings.

So the father ran. Think of that! "His father saw him, and was moved with compassion," - "moved with compassion" for this naughty young man who had spent all his money, squandered it - "and ran, and fell upon his neck, and covered him with kisses". He gave him that assurance that his love was still the same.

"And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee". That is important too. If something has been done that is wrong, it needs to be confessed to, but the confession does not need to be long. "I am no longer worthy to be called thy son". Well, who of us is? But we do not come into sonship because of our worthiness; it is because of God's desire for us to have that place. And his father, if I may put it simply, interrupted him gently before he said, "make me as one of thy hired servants". "But the father said to his bondmen, Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it". The fatted calf was not produced in an instant; it was there; it was ready; and the answer to every matter is ready and waiting in Christ. "And let us eat and make merry: for this my son was dead and has come to life, was lost and has been found. And they began to make merry". Others have said the merriment has not ceased, and I do not suppose it will until the Lord comes and then the rejoicing will be carried on in a fuller way in glory.

I just want to touch on the elder son because we are very critical of the elder son, speaking as he does of Israel who had rejected the overtures of grace. But look at the end of verse 28: "And his father went out and besought him". I would just like to draw your attention to what Peter says of Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles: "him, given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain", chap 2: 23. That is a word to the elder son. Israel did that. And then further in verse 32: "This Jesus has God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses. Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God ..."; and then in verses 36-38: "Let the whole house of Israel" - this is still addressed to the elder son - "therefore know assuredly that God has made him, this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. And having heard it they were pricked in heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, What shall we do, brethren? And Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptised, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". Do not think that the fact that the father went out and besought the elder son was without result. There was a result. The father did not get him in Luke 15, but he got him in the Acts. "What shall we do, brethren? ... Repent, and be baptised". You know, the love of God never fails. When we say, "Love never fails" (1 Cor 13: 8), do we mean it?

O the love of God is boundless,
Perfect, causeless, full and free!
(Hymn 212)

And it goes on and it persists: "Love has long patience, is kind", 1 Cor 13: 4. It does not overlook evil. That house of Israel, those of that house who were to be saved, of "the whole house of Israel", they had to repent; they had to acknowledge that what they had done was wrong; but when they did, they received exactly the same blessing as the nations: they were baptised and received the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If a person is recovered, he is brought back to the fulness of what God has in mind for them. Indeed, if we mention Leviticus 14, "the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing", the leper is anointed

after he is cleansed in the way that the priest is anointed. He actually gets a greater place after he is cleansed than he had before it: that is the grace of God. Well, he said to the elder son, "Child, *thou* art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine. But it was right to make merry and rejoice, because this thy brother was dead and has come to life again, and was lost and has been found".

Well, there you are, the spirit of the glad tidings, without reproach, without condemnation. If I may quote something else I heard in the gospel when I was young: reference was made to the Lord's 'unrebuking gaze', JT vol 56 p27. How can that be so? - because He bore your sins and mine. He does not hold reproach or condemnation; He holds out the boundless love of God.

May we know something of it, for His Name's sake!

Edinburgh

31st May 20

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD”

John N Darby

Psalm 23

The Lord takes here the place of the Shepherd who leads His sheep out and goes before them; but He has passed through the experiences of the sheep for us under the leading of Jehovah, His Shepherd. And in this character, if the Lord has been able to speak as He does in this Psalm, if He has been able to show a *heart* which nothing could trouble, it was not because His way had no pain or difficulty, or because He had no enemies. Rather the opposite, Jesus was straitened until He was baptised in death and the wrath of God. His soul was anguished; His *spirit* troubled; all His enemies were before Him; He suffered the contradiction of sinners against Himself. He experienced tribulation and distress; and said to those who were called to follow Him: “In the world you will have tribulation”, John 16: 33. Yes, we also must pass where He has gone; and He shows us the way for He has found the same circumstances there, the same relief and the same graces as ourselves.

Jesus had not, like us, the difficulty of evil in Him, being without sin. How much more sensitive than us He was to the suffering of evil which surrounded Him! Where we are often hardened by evil, He felt it perfectly. Christ sympathises with us; nobody sympathised with Him; nobody could say to Him, “be of good courage, I have overcome the world”. Having sin in us, we therefore suffer much less than Him; but, apart from that, He placed Himself in the same circumstances as us. He employed in them the same means as those which we are called to use, dependence and prayer, with the same assurance of being answered.

While putting us under His own safe keeping as our Shepherd, He also places Himself, as Man, under the safe keeping of God. He confides Himself to Jehovah, leaning Himself on Him. God says of Him, “Behold my servant whom I uphold”, Isa 42: 1.

It is sweet for the sheep to see Him walking before them, and tracing the way for them, in outward weakness, although He were

God supreme; but with this difference that, for Him, all was still to be accomplished, whereas for us *all is accomplished*.

The Jews confided in their institutions, but this was not faith. In this Psalm, when all the institutions fail, when unrighteousness abounds, the faithful one makes the blessed discovery that Jehovah is his Shepherd. It is when everything is done by Satan to weaken faith, that this one finds an unshakeable support in God. Jesus teaches this to our hearts by His example and in contemplating His path we learn what is our confidence; in a difficult position, we know that Jesus was also found there and God could not but show His faithfulness to His Son. In seeing the bond between God and Jesus, I learn to know the bond between God and myself; for Jesus humbled Himself to take our position and to put Himself in our place.

Verse 1 - No matter what the circumstances, it is a settled thing: I shall have no want. It is not through lack of difficulties, for it says, in another Psalm, that it is in "a dry and weary land without water", Ps 63: 1. He knows that Jehovah provides for all that and He feels safe. The cares of the Shepherd reassure the child of God and he goes freely, in the liberty of grace, everywhere the Shepherd leads him.

Verse 2 - Jehovah is my Shepherd and I rest; all the power of demons cannot hinder me from being in the green places. It is faith that gives this assurance; one is in the midst of enemies without fear. The good Shepherd watches over us and He leads us by still waters, where we find refreshment for our souls. There is liberty; one goes in and out and finds pasture. Nothing can separate us from this love which concerns itself with us. He who has given His life for His sheep, shows us love so much the more as the difficulties increase in number; and, taken up to the Father, He looks after His sheep, as the Father looked after Him when He was on the earth. "The eyes of Jehovah run to and fro through the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him", 2 Chron 16: 9. As we see in this passage, it is in the difficulties that He allows to this end, and when there is nothing in the circumstances that can encourage the soul, that God shows

Himself strong. To seek God alone, to have no other support than Him: that is where perfection shows and integrity of heart.

Verse 3 - It is not that there is no fear: Paul had fears within and combats without, 2 Cor 7: 5. Jesus offered prayers and supplications, "with strong crying and tears", Heb 5: 7. All this can happen to a true heart. The Lord then comes to restore the soul and to console those who are cast down. It is said of Jesus that "the waters are come in unto my soul", Ps 69: 1. "My soul", He says, "is cast down within me", Ps 42: 6. And in the final count, He was divinely restored. The flesh avoids a way where it will find itself cast down, but in doing so it avoids having to do with God and loses the opportunity to know Him. Sooner or later, the restored soul which has found the Lord, rejoices in the comfort and the light, and receives the conviction that it is Himself who has led it in the way of blessing.

In verse 5, one finds the consequence of the fact that one leans on the Shepherd. The enemies are there, but God prepares the table and one rejoices, even in their presence. What joys they prove who have the consciousness that the Lord who knows our way blesses and leads us. Our conflict is a real conflict; to avoid it is to avoid the blessing. From the moment one steps forward for the service of the Lord, one is necessarily in the view of the enemies. If one wishes to show who the people of God are, it must be shown in the presence of Satan. Satan can reproach, and this is what he wants, but we must combat and mortify the flesh, while relying on the faithfulness of God. Those who do not have a true heart and count on other things than Him never find that God shows Himself strong.

Faith is the rule by which God leads us. When He is the object of our hearts and of our faith, all becomes simple and easy. With a single eye, the body is full of light, Matt 6: 22. It is a pathway of conflicts, of being cast down, of discouragement sometimes, but a pathway where God is found. There are not always still waters, but the soul acquires the certainty of the way where Christ leads it and the certainty that we pass where Christ has passed.

If, by God's grace, I see you again, I am fully convicted that the Lord is our Shepherd, that He will lead each of us; and I hope, if it

pleases God, that we shall see each other again more united and more blessed than ever!

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