

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

SECOND SERIES

No. 167

February 2021

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THE WORD OF THE CROSS

1 Corinthians 1: 14-31

DAB When we were last able to be together we considered what we have in verse 9 of this chapter: “God is faithful, by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord”, and the exhortation in verse 10, “that there be not among you divisions”. We read of one of the first attacks on the testimony which sought to bring in disunity in Acts chapter 15, with erroneous teaching being brought forward that would divide believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Paul was very much one of those who combatted for the Lord in that attack, and the victory was won. Now we have here, I am assuming not many years later, divisions between Gentile and Gentile, and divisions that the saints in Corinth seemed quite free to boast in. So Paul must have very much felt it when he asked in verse 13: “Is the Christ divided? has Paul been crucified for you?”.

Where we have read here, Paul says, “I thank God that I have baptised none of you”. I think we can see the wisdom of the Holy Spirit here, that although there were one or two named persons, there was not a company that could become some sort of sect on account of being those baptised by Paul. With such disunity and confusion in this local assembly, Paul goes back to the glad tidings, and draws attention to the foolishness of the glad tidings. It is our common ground, our holding to “the word of the cross”, so that anything of the flesh that brings in this disunity might be judged as put away.

RJF Do you think the note *f* in verse 10 to the word “united” is helpful? It has in mind ‘a whole; or, if broken, are restored to one complete whole’. The central point of gathering is that everybody who comes in is Christ’s. The means for that gathering, for any to enter in, is by the cross of Christ. That is something that should always be at the forefront of our minds in relation to any matter that might arise.

DAB That goes back to what we had when reading in Ephesians: “and has broken down the middle wall of enclosure, having annulled the enmity in his flesh, the law of commandments in ordinances, that he might form the two in himself into one new man, making peace; and might reconcile both in one body to God by the cross, having by it slain the enmity”, chap 2: 14-16. There again it is the cross. Being “perfectly united” is not in a man-made construction, because then you would always see the mark where it had been joined together. Going back to the cross removes anything man-made entirely. This is God’s construction; it is the one body in Christ; there is no join or scar, no weak point: it is Christ and His work.

PHM In verse 2, Paul addresses the Corinthians as “those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints”. He then says, “with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours”. Our call is to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the basis on which we can be of one mind; without that there will be division. We have all been sanctified, and if we all call on that Name then we will be of one mind.

DAB I suppose that is almost without qualification. Calling upon the Lord’s name is open to every believer. There is not a decree, or sect, or a certain line of truth I need to understand to get the gain of this. I call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we can claim as our own because of what He has done for us. It is the basis of our fellowship.

PHM The fact that you have the full title, Lord Jesus Christ, would include that we would know Him in each of those names. We accept Him as Lord, and thus come under His authority; as Jesus, it is the One known in nearness and intimacy; and as the Christ, He is known as God’s anointed one. Part of being of one mind is accepting the Lord in these three ways, as Lord, as Jesus, and as Christ.

DAB How great it is, the Name that we call on. Our every blessing is founded on that Name, as we have in Ephesians, “every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ”, chap 1: 3. I agree that these names should govern our lives, but we also, in effect, claim

everything that Christ has done for us by calling on His Name. It seems a very expansive thought.

PSB So we find that what was broken in the garden of Eden, the relationship between God and man, has been restored in a much greater way, in Christ. The greater my appreciation of that relationship, the greater my appreciation of all that I have been brought into in the Lord Jesus Christ.

DAB Tell us more of what is in your mind? In this scripture Paul brings them back to the glad tidings because the relationship had broken down between brother and brother.

PSB I was weighing over what was said in relation to the cross; what happened at the very beginning was that lawlessness came in. Man fell out of the relationship in which he had been set with God. What the cross has done has entirely removed that order of man and established something entirely new. New creation has been established in the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore, if I am in the enjoyment of that, I am to understand that the order of man that ended at the cross cannot possibly enter into the new order of things. If there is division, it means there is not the enjoyment of the life that this new relationship affords, which Christ has brought me into by ending what I am naturally at the cross.

DAB It is good to get an impression of the cost to Christ to remove the old man in me. It is not that we dwell on what our flesh is, but the more I understand the cost to Christ to bear my sins on the cross, the more I will understand how much He loved me. Then I can see that if He bore my sins in His body upon the tree, and He bore the sins of my brother in His body on the tree, it would show me how much Christ loves my brother too. That would increase the value we have of one another.

PSB I think so. I do not think we can ever contemplate the cross too much. One who was absolutely perfect went that way for me. The Man who was of an order that God found delight in took on what was due to me. He did that in view of bringing us forward in Him for

the Father's delight. There is something intensely vital in the contemplation of the cross.

RJF The greatest dimension of the cross is vertical: the cross is the means by which man is reconciled to God. The passage here brings out much as to the horizontal relationship between one and another, but reconciliation between one and another is secondary in comparison to the extent of the distance that needed to be overcome to reconcile man to God. And it is important to see that it is not to reconcile God to man: it is reconcile man to God.

PSB I think it is good to draw attention to that because it is primary. If that is so, if I am in the reality and enjoyment of that in my own soul, there would be no strife with my brother. You are also right in emphasising it is God who has reconciled man to Himself; it is what He wanted. Should that not find an answer in my own heart? He wanted me for Himself, and He did that by giving up what was most precious.

RJF It is something that is central to the gospel: that great appeal, "Be reconciled to God", 2 Cor 5: 20. God has provided everything for that reconciliation to take place. But each individual must take that step to be reconciled.

The other thing I was thinking about the cross is that Christ was lifted up to die. He was lifted up as an object of derision, but also an object to be seen. Thinking back to the fiery serpent, those that looked at the fiery serpent lived, Num 21: 9. Therefore when we contemplate the cross, do we always need to bear in mind that Christ was lifted up? We should always have Christ in view.

PHM With reference to what you have been saying about the cross, and being reconciled to God, it is interesting where we began: it says, "I thank God". Paul begins this epistle saying, "by God's will". He seems to trace back to the source. Over the page we get many references to what God is doing. For example, "to us that are saved it is God's power". He begins by thanking God. He could have thanked his Lord, but in relation to what you are saying about the cross, he traces it back to God.

PSB That is good. He takes it right back. Christ went to the cross for me. That is right, but do we hold that primarily He went that way to fulfil God's will? I am blessed through it, but Christ came to do the will of God. So, Paul's desire is that everything is taken back to God.

DAB The whole passage that we have read emphasises God. Can we link this thought to the revelation of God? What I mean by that is that this was the way God moved to reveal Himself. He has come out to us by the cross; it is the way through which God has made Himself known. Perhaps we can wonder then at the counsel of God, that everything, all that we can enter into in faith, is through the word of the cross.

KJW I was just looking at the words of hymn 357 -

But in the cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be.

I was following up the thought of linking back to God, that it was the primary thought, the Lord going that way to fulfil the will of God. That hymn has several references bearing on our conversation. It starts with -

The perfect righteousness of God
It speaks about the cross of Christ,

'Tis in the cross of Christ we trace
His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.

I had not really thought too much about God's righteousness and the cross of Christ, but it seems to be linked very much with the will of God and His desire to reconcile man to Himself.

DAB We have here a reference to the foolishness of the preaching. We can wonder why that is, but all that we have spoken of is found through faith. That is utterly foolish to the world; they would need evidence; that seems to be true even in what the world is passing through at the moment, and the ways in which it seeks to meet it. To commit our life and our safety to God in faith might be utter foolishness to the world. But Paul says, "to us that are saved it is God's power". It is a power that the world cannot touch.

KJW I was thinking of that; from a natural perspective man might think, how can someone in such weak circumstances do so much? But the work was completed at the cross; there the blood of Christ was shed, which that hymn also refers to. He is the subject of faith which we are to lay hold of.

RJF That brings us back to the scripture that was referred to in Ephesians 2. Before we have reference to the breaking down of the middle wall of enclosure, it says: “ye who once were afar off are become nigh by the blood of the Christ”. I was noticing it is not the cross of Christ that is referred to in 1 Cor 1: 17; it is “the cross of **the** Christ”. It brings out His distinctiveness. Our whole approach as to the cross must be through the blood.

KJW That is helpful. I noticed it was “**the** Christ”, really emphasising the greatness of that One, the way that He went, all that He gave, His precious blood being shed, the basis laid for reconciliation.

RJF As was mentioned earlier, the name Christ refers to the anointing. And so if you think of “the cross of the Christ”, it is the cross of the One whom God has anointed. God has set out His Man as the One whom He has provided.

KJW It speaks of foolishness and wisdom. From a natural perspective what weakness was seen, but that was the cross of the Christ, the anointed One; and it is the greatness of that One who did the work.

PSB The thief on the cross saw that, Luke 23: 39-43. It makes you wonder that a man hanging on the cross beside the Lord was the one that saw something more than other men saw.

KJW I am always amazed by how much that thief understood of the Lord’s kingdom and His greatness in a few short moments. That was God’s work seen in him, the wisdom of God.

RJF Do you think note a (v 18), as to “the word”, is helpful? It is ‘the word which speaks of the cross’. In terms of a subject, therefore, it is far broader than the simple consideration of what the cross was as

a physical object, and brings out the whole moral thought of what was being reconciled. From a moral point of view, the cross of Christ is the central frame of reference for the entirety of a believer's dealings with God.

DAB Yes; so we see that the veil of the temple was rent in the midst, while the Lord was still on the cross (Luke 23: 45-46); it was not when He came out of death. God coming out to men was the on basis of the work on the cross.

RJF At that point every liability had been resolved, and every question had been answered. Everything that followed from man's perspective, is really a comfort and assurance. God could not allow His Holy One to see corruption. The fact that He was raised again is another signifier that He was God's Holy One. The fact that He has been received up into heaven gives me a place there too.

DAB You might say that if the veil of the temple had been rent in two from the top to the bottom (Matt 27: 51) sometime after the Lord had borne judgment on the cross, it might suggest that there was something else that had needed to be done. But no, God could come out unhinderedly in grace the moment that work was completed. The mind of man cannot add or take anything from it; the Lord could say, "It is finished". Whatever my understanding of the truth is, the blessing is mine because the work was accomplished by Christ and cannot be tarnished.

PSB God's heart was made known. He could come out to man, and man could go in to God. In the Old Testament a veil is drawn over who God is, but what you see here is that behind God's operations He is making His love known. That is really the purpose of His operations, that God is known in the fulness of the revelation of Himself. I judge it would be right to say that is what is seen in the veil of the temple being rent. It shows the greatness of the work of Christ.

DAB It brings the immensity of this dispensation to us. God in His sovereign will chose how to make Himself known. He could have come out in judgment on the whole scene for how they dealt with His

Son, but He has come out in grace and mercy. This magnifies why it is that Paul draws the Corinthians' attention to this: we are in a dispensation of grace, and this should meet our personal disagreements. What if my brother has wronged me? Well, what has God done for me to meet my failure? What can I therefore do for my brother? How could the Lord's people be divided if everyone held that spirit?

PSB That links with our previous thought that if our vertical links are right, there is more chance of our horizontal links being right. It is a testing matter, because I know what I am, but if my vertical links are right, the horizontal links will be healthy as well.

PHM I was thinking that the centurion had that impression of what was vertical. "Jesus, having cried with a loud voice, said, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit. And having said this, he expired. Now the centurion, seeing what took place, glorified God, saying, In very deed this man was just", Luke 23: 46, 47. We were saying that the malefactor was given a revelation by God. What led the centurion to give glory to God? He must have been affected by the power of what he saw take place, and as a result of that vertical view he could give glory to God. The centurion was given the understanding to trace what he witnessed back to God.

RJF If we contemplate the scene at the cross, the centurion had to look up to Jesus on the cross. What he saw transformed his view and his understanding, so much so that he could not refrain from saying what he had seen. Mark records him saying, "Truly this man was Son of God", chap 15: 39. It was a matter of revelation to him.

DAB The majority of references to the Lord on the cross present what we are calling a vertical view; that is, God was before Him. Even the cup which He was to take, He received it from His Father. And, as we have seen with both the centurion and the thief upon the cross, they also had an apprehension of God. There is also a horizontal reference in what the Lord said to John, regarding John and the Lord's mother, John 19: 26-27. I think this illustrates the

point being made. As we are drawn to what we are calling our vertical link we have in Christ, He maintains our horizontal links.

RJF There was one expression, one of the words of the Lord on the cross: "I thirst", John 19: 38. That is a very profound, deep matter. We would have to look back into the psalms to get some understanding of it. Although it was expressed outwardly in the form of feeling, it seems to be an expression of something very deep.

DAB If we consider Paul's reference to the foolishness of the preaching, men generally do not even feel that they need salvation, let alone having someone else to save them; you can understand that it is entirely against what the flesh would want. What the preaching demands is that everything of myself goes, and Christ becomes everything to me. We are in a world where you assert your own rights, and try to make a name for yourself and do well for yourself, and the gospel runs entirely contrary to that.

RJF The cross itself is not only a point of salvation; it is a point of regulation. There is a very interesting expression here, "to us that are saved". That seems to me to be very inclusive, but it is also to regulate us; all these strifes that come in at the beginning of the paragraph indicated they were not regulated by the cross of Christ. Simply speaking, everything must be seen in the light of the cross and weighed up against it.

DAB So if we follow your thought as to what is inclusive, it is really what Paul seeks to draw out in this passage. He speaks of the exclusive character, or what distinguishes men, in the world - even on what the cross is to them. Here we have how Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek wisdom. Next we see that Christ crucified is an offence to the Jews and foolishness to the nations. But then we have, "to those that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ God's power and God's wisdom". It is very inclusive.

PSB He does not set himself apart, although he begins the epistle as "a called apostle", v 1. He could almost have commanded them to be unified, but we also find Sosthenes the brother mentioned, and

then we have, “to us that are saved”. It takes away all division and brings them together as one.

DAB Yes, and I believe it is right to say that that spirit is found in all the authors of the New Testament. I was thinking of John, a fellow-partaker in the sufferings in Jesus, Rev 1: 9. That is really what was emphasised, that the saints, the brethren, are all one in Christ. We find that to be a very prominent thought.

RJF I was thinking back to the way the epistle begins: “all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v 2), and “to those sanctified in Christ Jesus”. This would be the thought that Paul had in writing. There were different strifes, but all of them were “called saints”.

DAB Paul helps too as to the spirit in which we meet such manifestations of the flesh. He fully identifies himself with the Corinthians. Even if they would not accept him he says, “I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved”, 2 Cor 12: 15. That is someone truly in the gain of the word of the cross.

But, speaking of the inclusiveness, there is a certain exclusive aspect to it as well. It is “to those that are called”. That is the exclusive character.

RJF That is the other side of “called saints”, saints by divine calling: anyone who is called is included regardless of background or anything else that marked the saints at this point, or the saints in the day in which we are.

DAB So it is not only taking account of the value of any large body of Christians, but it is the value of each individual. In the world, if there was a company of one hundred, and one left, the ninety nine remaining probably would not really notice. But in divine things we should feel it very much because that saint is called, and they are valued and treasured by God.

RJF So that is what we find in Luke 15.

DAB Yes, and the Lord does not delegate recovery in that passage; He does it Himself. That is something we can take encouragement in.

RJF We have that lovely expression there, “he lays it upon his own shoulders”, v 5. In the world at large there is a lot of focus on inequality and that kind of thing. If we look back to the beginning of this chapter, everyone who is a called saint is equal before God. If we regard someone as less than equal, we are far from God because we are not seeing things as He sees them. The second of these epistles speaks about the weak brother for whom Christ died.

DAB The Lord, having recovered the lost sheep, seeks those who had like feeling as to the matter, and says, “Rejoice with me”, v 6. In that passage, the Lord does not look for others to do the recovering, but would it be right to say He does look for those who would sympathise with Him as to that lost sheep?

PSB That is helpful: the Lord recovers, but do I enter in feelingly with Him in prayer in order that He does it? Sadly, things come in and we cannot enjoy liberty with some we have had over the years; do they become distant in my mind, or do I feel it and carry it before the Lord? Being called saints applies to all. If I cannot walk with a believer it should not make them any less a brother or sister. The Lord’s desire is that we should enjoy relationships together. The perfection of it will only be when He takes us all to be with Himself. We should feel the situation in Christendom generally, not just those who we have enjoyed the company of, but all believers caught up in whatever they may be caught up in. We should feel these things in some measure as He does.

DAB The scripture says, “Rejoice with those that rejoice, weep with those that weep”, Rom 12: 15. That comes back to the truth of the one body. If part of the body is wounded or damaged the whole body feels it, it is affected, and it does not function as well; we are to enter into and feel these things. Now, I can say that objectively, but I do not find these things naturally in me. How do we become more

sensitive to these things, and feel the loss that we have had? The memory does begin to fade naturally; we get used to the new norm.

PSB I wonder if we need to go back to what was said earlier about the vertical links. If I am in the enjoyment of what God is to me, it means I am in the enjoyment of His presence, which means I have some appreciation of His feelings. We touch that at the Supper; we enter into His joy, and what He has. This is something I should cultivate more, my relationship with Him. He will cause me to have some understanding of what His feelings are. It is not an emotion we can put on; it has to be something as a result of drawing on Him.

DAB The Lord says: “Ye are my friends if ye practise whatever I command you”, John 15: 14. The idea of “friends” brings in the feeling side of things, and brings in the thought of relationship. The way these feelings are cultivated is that we practise what the Lord commands. Would that be the answer?

KJW I am often challenged by this section. “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you”, John 15: 12. That would extend to believers we can no longer walk with. That is the level of the love we should have for one another.

DAB That is helpful. It brings back what we had at the start of the reading, taking account of what it cost Christ to love me. We are to love one another on that level.

PSB It is a beautiful passage: “As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you: abide in my love. If ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have spoken these things to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full. This is my commandment that ye love one another, as I have loved you”, v 9-12. Then it goes on as to laying down His life and, “Ye are my friends”, v 14. The whole passage links with your question as to feeling. It is to “love one another, as I have loved you”, abiding in the Lord’s love.

DAB It is how God has made Himself known. It almost characterises the whole dispensation of grace we are in. “For God

so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal", John 3: 16. God does not desire that any man should perish, but "that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth", 1 Tim 2: 4. There seems to be an atmosphere of love in this whole dispensation; God's desire is that all should come to the knowledge of the truth. You and I, as recipients of that love, are to take that love to others. It should be - and will be in the Spirit - easy to love one another in that way. It may not be so in the flesh, but if I am in the spirit and gain of these things, it will not be a chore or an effort. It will come naturally as features of Christ are being manifested in our body, which we read is "the temple of the Holy Spirit", 1 Cor 6: 19. If the Holy Spirit has free rein these features will radiate out without effort.

PSB In the power of the Spirit, we are formed after Christ. If that is not so with me, it is because there is something of me that has come in; I am looking at it thinking how it is affecting me and I have got my eye off Christ. I was thinking of what we had a year ago; if there is not reconciliation, it means flesh has come in. The only way to overcome that - I cannot do it in my own strength - is in the power of the Spirit and by occupation with the One who is in the glory.

DAB I wonder if that is what it is to "boast in the Lord". Boasting is often thought of as a wrong thing, but you are boasting in Someone who has done it all, and He has come out in love. Our basis of fellowship together, our basis of brotherly love, our basis of working things out together, our basis of being perfectly united, our basis to go on in the world, our basis to be lights in the world, is in all that is radiating out from the work of Christ in us. Any boasting in the Lord, therefore, is boasting in the work of Christ and taking account of that work in others.

PSB That is good, and to be a light in the world you do not have to say anything; it is what you are, what radiates out from you. It is what comes naturally; that means naturally as according to the character of Christ. We do not have to say anything. If we are given

to speak it should be what we express as being 'a light in the world',
not what we claim to be.

Sunbury

8th July 2020

Key to initials

(all local in Sunbury):-

D A Barlow; P S Barlow; R J Flowerdew; P H Morris; K J Walkinshaw

A LITTLE CHILD IN THE MIDST

Gary M Chellberg

Mark 9: 33-37

I have been thinking a little bit about the fact that, Lord willing, there will be a little child set in the midst shortly in this locality; I was thinking of the importance of each one of us in relation to a little child. I was struck earlier in the week with the fact that the Lord takes the little child and sets it in the midst. If you can imagine a circle of brethren, which is what this is a picture of, the Lord is in the very centre of that. I was struck that it does not say that He just picked up this little child, or took a little child - the other accounts give different information - but rather He sets it in their midst. I was struck with the fact that the child is in the exact same relationship to every person in that room. The twelve disciples and the Lord were all equidistant from the little child. It shows that what He was doing by this act was to affect each one in that circle in the same way, with the same importance. He is using this as an example to help them to understand their relationship with the Lord, and how they are to behave in relation to Him. That is something that each one of us, brothers and sisters, need to be exercised about.

The disciples had been arguing on the way who was greatest; that is a common argument in any circle of society in the world we live in. It has even entered into the religious world, and it is sad and sobering to see that. I have heard of some pastors asking one another, 'How many have you saved? And how many have you saved?' and so on. That whole idea takes away from the glory of the Lord. Here, the Lord brings them back to the very basics, by bringing this little child and setting it in the midst. He says, in another account, "for the kingdom of the heavens is of such", Matt 19: 14. Everything of what the Lord was trying to accomplish, and demonstrate, and show in the world was to be marked by this character. It is not a question of who is the biggest and the greatest, the smartest and the fastest, and all these things. The Lord is

saying, 'I want to take you back to what is important'. He uses this very simple way for each one of us to understand. He takes this little child into His arms and says to them, "Whosoever shall receive one of such little children in my name, receives me", and then, "him who sent me". If we want to take on any features of Christ, it has to be in that relationship. It is not in relation to what I have done.

We may say, Lord willing, when this little child is added to our locality, that it will not be a question of what I teach this little child, or that I do this or that. Rather, it is that each one of us has a responsibility to bring this little one into nearness to Christ, and from that place they will take on His features. That is really the important point of this; we become what Jesus was looking for when we learn this lesson. And that should be the exercise of each one of us here locally. We prepare for this natural event in different ways - some have painted rooms, bought clothing, car seats etc. These are practical preparations, but they are not the most important form of preparation; this is. The Lord Jesus takes this little child into His arms in this account, and He brings out this wonderful teaching that He is trying to get across to His disciples. They had been missing the point; they had been looking at what *they* had done, up to this point. John says, 'Well, some other people were casting out demons and this is bad; you know, it is competition' (v 38), but the Lord takes it back to the very basics and says that *this* is what is important. It is not who is first or greatest; it is all about *Him*. '*It is me, Jesus,*' is basically what He says.

As we all prepare spiritually for this event, as to what we can pass on, it is not just to the little one to be born, it has to do with every young believer - first of all in our locality, and others we break bread with, and then, in the bigger sense of the word, all in the Christian fellowship, all of God's people. We should always have an exercise to be prepared to bring out features of Him, of the Lord Jesus. That is where the blessing comes in. When He returns He will find persons like this. In the account in Matthew 19: 14: "for the kingdom of the heavens is of such". He connects it with the highest power and authority. This little child is to be connected with that kind

of authority, the same authority that the Lord Jesus speaks of in the end of Matthew where He says, "All power has been given me in heaven and upon earth", Matt 28: 18. I have always liked that statement that He uses: "All power has been given me in heaven and upon earth". There is no asterisk, no footnote; it is total power, total authority. That is the kingdom of the heaven. It is the area where God is supreme. Here in this setting they were trying to give themselves a place in their pride. Whatever they were arguing and reasoning about, the Lord obviously knew about it, and when He questions them, it immediately affects their conscience because they were in the presence of One who was infinitely greater than them. As they come into contact with that, all of a sudden, their reasoning becomes very weak. How could you say who is greater? The One who was the greatest was in the midst of them. He does not come in and say, 'Well let me show you what I know'. What I like about this is that He goes back to the very basics of what the kingdom of the heavens is, and the features that are to come out: simplicity, dependence, loveliness. There are many things that could be said about this little child. The Lord brings the child in and He says, 'This is what I am talking about; this is what I am trying to further and develop', and He challenges the disciples in this way.

Then it says, "Whosoever shall receive me, does not receive me, but him who sent me". The Lord takes it all the way back to the Father. If we receive Him then we receive the Father and then, you could say, we have everything. He brings us into the fullest blessing that He had in mind to speak to these disciples about. He says, 'If you receive me, you have received Him that has sent me'. It is a wonderful thing that this whole incident opens up, and I just thought in our own minds that we could make practical application of this. In the preparation locally that is going on there is another side to it that is *the* most important, the spiritual side. You can have all the practical preparations in the world but they are not going to be any good if we cannot bring another person to Christ, and help them to take on the features of this heavenly kingdom, and receive the blessing of not just Him, but of "him who sent me". There is that side

of it. We look at the world and its leaders as they try to combat the current pandemic, and you see the chaos, confusion and the breakdown of what they are doing because they are operating according to the mind of man; we all know where that is going to go. This scripture is the contrast to that. The Lord is saying, 'You need to prepare; the whole kingdom is going to consist of people like this and this is what you need to be exercised about, not who is greatest and who is this and who is that'. He does not even comment on their argument; He knew what they were thinking about and arguing about.

It is interesting in Genesis that Joseph, as a type of the Lord, has the same problem. He says to his brothers, "Do not quarrel on the way", Gen 45: 24. You can see the whole scenario opening up. The brothers would say, 'Well, you did this, and you did that,' and argue among themselves. Joseph has to step in, as a type of the Lord, saying, 'No, we do not have time for that; there is something far greater that is coming in and about to be revealed', and that is, this kingdom which is being established, and which will never end. That is what is important and that is what we need to exercise ourselves with, and be preparing for. As we do that, it is important to remember this feature in the midst of the circle. It is not just family, not just relatives, or the new relationships - it is other localities, we all enter into this, it is in the midst. It is in relation to each one of us. It is important for each one of us to learn this lesson, as it were, and I would encourage us to do this, and also I would encourage us to read the context a little further. I see the importance of it, and I would like to encourage each one of us in this - to prepare, for His Name's sake.

Word in a Ministry Meeting, Wheaton
12th March 2020

GLAD TIDINGS AND GOOD TIDINGS

A D Munro

Luke 2: 10, 11; 4: 16-21

2 Kings 7: 1-5, 8, 9

I have in mind to speak about glad tidings and good tidings. That is the day in which we live; we live in the day of the glad tidings, which the Lord spoke of in Luke chapter 4: “the acceptable year of the Lord”. It is still running its course. Thank God for that! If we had read from Isaiah 61, and read the same passage, we might have gone on to say, “and the day of vengeance of our God”, v 2. Thanks be to God that that is not yet so. It *will* come: make no mistake! The Lord is the only One who could read that verse and stop where He stopped because He knew, because of the work He was going to accomplish, that that acceptable year of the Lord would run for a prescribed time. It is not known how long that day will be; I do not know. There is enough blessing and forgiveness and mercy for everyone. “Righteousness of God” is “towards all”, but it is only “upon all those who believe”, Rom 3: 22. It is not an amnesty. God is prepared to overlook sin because He has dealt with it in the Person of His well-beloved Son.

That is why I read in Luke 2. What a message to these shepherds! I have been reading a book of Mr James Taylor’s ministry, and it is suggested that Luke enlarges on the sympathetic conditions into which the Lord came. Vol 21 p147. The general reception to the Lord’s incoming in Luke is far more favourable than in the other gospels. There was still no room for Him in the inn, but there were Mary and Elizabeth and Zacharias and Simeon and Anna, and then there were these shepherds. They were persons who were in sympathy with heaven, with what heaven was doing. They did not know exactly what was going to happen, but they were prepared. And that is one of the other wonderful things about the gospel: the ground is prepared for the seed to fall into it. There is never anything wrong with the seed: the seed is the word of God.

The problem lies in your heart and in mine because naturally they are barren: it is hard soil. But the Lord would work sovereignly and in His own way.

There is a wonderful verse in Psalm 65 which speaks about smoothing the clods: "Thou dost satiate its furrows, thou smoothest its clods, thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof", v 10. That is God working, preparing the ground in your soul and in mine to receive the gospel. It would probably be somewhat similar to the truth of new birth, which is mysterious. It cannot be defined, but you know when it has been working. Some of us have known it in our own experience when we were children, or perhaps later in life just before we were converted. We knew there was something telling us there was something missing in our life. We were pursuing this, and we were pursuing that, doing our own will and finding no satisfaction. There was a nagging ache that told you something was wrong, and what was that? It was your conscience. God has an avenue into every man's heart via his conscience, and He would use that to stir up the sense in your soul that there is something missing, and that something is the knowledge of Jesus as Saviour. Without it you will never get satisfaction; you can try as hard as you like. There was a woman in the gospels who spent her living trying to get cured of her disease. She came and touched the hem of the Saviour's garment and she was cured immediately. She found liberty in her heart; she found joy in her heart, Luke 8: 43-48.

There was a man called Saul of Tarsus who was the archetypal Jew, Pharisee of the Pharisees, who kept every iota of the law, as he thought. He probably did not really, but he was dark; and he was present at the stoning of Stephen, and what does the Lord Jesus say soon after? "Saul, Saul... it is hard for thee to kick against goads", Acts 26: 14. I do not know if you know what a goad is. It is an instrument that a farmer would use, just a long stick with a slightly sharp end, and as the cattle are perhaps going the wrong way, he would just give them a little prod to make them go the right way. It is a bit like what Isaiah says: "This is the way, walk ye in it", chap 30:

21. That is like a goad. It is not a vicious instrument; God does not operate viciously but He would operate tenderly to make you realise that you are on the wrong path. If you do not know Jesus as Saviour, my dear friend, I would not like to be in your shoes: your position is perilous. There was Saul of Tarsus at the stoning of Stephen, and he saw something depicted there that must have troubled his heart, a man accepting humiliation, accepting stoning, and not complaining. "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7: 60): that was the spirit of Christ coming out in Stephen. Two chapters later it came out in Saul. Saul was struck down on that Damascus road and all his credibility, and these letters to Damascus that Saul was carrying, were worthless. They were worthless anyway, but I think he threw them away. Why? Because he came under another Master.

The young man, servant of an Amalekite, in 1 Samuel 30 is another wonderful illustration of the grace of God to a person who had been constituted an enemy. He had been responsible for the captivity of David's wives and his children, and yet the grace of the gospel reached out to that man as he lay dying, deserted by his master. Why? Because he was not fit to be in the army, as men thought; he became fit for David's army. He was certainly one of these persons who came under David's benign influence, and became a satisfied person, and he became a soldier in David's army. David said, "Canst thou bring me down to this troop?", v 15. He said, 'Yes, but only if you do not give me back to my master'. When we were younger, we used to hear in ministry quite often as to 'changing your man', JT vol 38 p371. That man 'changed his man'; from being a servant of an Amalekite, he became a servant of David. He came under new ownership; he came under new guidance; he came under the guidance, typically, of the Saviour of the world.

These shepherds were amenable to divine direction, and they got this wonderful message: "glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people; for to-day a Saviour has been born to you in David's city, who is Christ the Lord". What a message! Think of the

change it would bring about in these men! Think of the comfort it would bring into their hearts! They belonged to a nation that was in captivity under Roman yoke, suffering under the righteous government of God, but a new day dawned in their lives, a light shone in the darkness: that light was Jesus, the Saviour of the world! Oh, dear friend, has the light of the Saviour dawned in your heart or are you still in the dark? Are you still turning away from Him? He is beseeching you. He is speaking to you tonight. His word would come to you in power, in grace, but in conviction.

So, when we come to chapter 4, the Lord in His wonderful grace goes into the synagogue. He knew He would not be welcome there, but He still went. He took the message of the gospel into the hearts of these persons who were entrenched in animosity and hatred against the word of God, and against the Saviour of the world. Jesus had been in the desert. He had overcome Satan in all his wiles; Satan had never met a man like this; he had never met a man that did not in some way yield to one of his temptations. He was rebuffed at every turn; he was rebuffed, defeated, humiliated, and in the power of that the Lord came out in public witness and public testimony, conveying the glad tidings to these poor benighted Israelites. What does He say? "He has anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor; he has sent me to preach to captives deliverance, and to the blind sight, to send forth the crushed delivered". Oh, dear friend, the world will crush you. It might not seem like it, but you will come under a weight that will suppress you. John Bunyan wrote in his treatise about the burden that was on Christian's back, that was weighing him down. The burden rolled away when Christian saw the cross.

Dear friend, that is where the cost of your salvation was worked out, when the spotless, holy, sinless Lamb of God was there on the cross. At the conclusion of three and a half years of public ministry, the verdict of the world was, "Away with this man", Luke 23: 18. "We will not that this man should reign over us", Luke 19: 14. Did that change God's disposition? Not a bit! Did that change the disposition of Jesus? Not a bit! What did He say? "Father, forgive

them, for they know not what they do”, Luke 23: 34. What words of grace! That was “the acceptable year of the Lord”, and it is still the same; the message has not changed. Covid-19 has not changed the message of the gospel, although I think we can say, in simplicity, it has enhanced the value of the gospel. It has magnified the glory of the Saviour that even in a world of such wickedness and such sorrow and such pressure “the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ “ (2 Cor 4: 4) is still shining out towards poor, weary, sinful man.

Dear friend, it is indeed glad tidings. I trust everyone can say, ‘Amen’ to that: the message of the Saviour, the message of forgiveness, the message of salvation, the message of peace with God, the message of justification, the wonderful fact of reconciliation, all these things! “We being still sinners, Christ has died for us”, Rom 5: 8. We had no merit; we deserved nothing. I can say that for everyone, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”, Rom 3: 23. The gospel is marked by truth but it is also: “grace and truth subsists through Jesus Christ”, John 1: 17. How fair God is! He would give you every opportunity, opportunity after opportunity.

Saul of Tarsus laid hold of it. The man that Peter and John came upon as they went into the temple in Acts chapter 3 laid hold of it. That man had been waiting for that day; he did not know what he was waiting for. It is almost as though he had faith that one day someone would come along and his circumstances would be changed. Peter said, “Silver and gold I have not; but what I have, this give I to thee; In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaræan rise up and walk”, Acts 3: 6. During the time when we were having no meetings at all, we were privileged to listen to some of the preachings from the past, and there was one which spoke about the hope that Peter and John brought into that man’s soul. In principle, the preacher said, they opened the doors of that temple. They had never been opened to him; the man was debarred from going in because of his ailments, but when Peter and John came along, they not only healed him of his disadvantage and gave him a link with the Saviour, not of the currency of this world, not the silver and gold of Israel or Palestine,

but the silver and gold of heaven, the silver speaking of redemption through the blood of Jesus and the gold speaking about the purpose of God, the righteousness of God, the love of God. They can only be available to us when we avail ourselves of the work of salvation, the work of redemption. Our guilt has to be met. The price of our salvation had to be paid for, and the precious, holy blood of Jesus still stands. In the types in Leviticus 16 the blood was on the mercy-seat, but in the Old Testament the mercy-seat was hidden. Only the high priest could go in and that only once a year. But now Romans 3 is telling us of One “whom God has set forth a mercy-seat”, v 25. It is as though He has brought the mercy-seat out of the holy place and is presenting it. He is making it available to every man. Oh, dear friend, take advantage of it! Do not trifle with time! The only thing that is in short supply in the gospel is time. There is no shortage of mercy or grace or forgiveness or love or peace or righteousness; the list is endless. But there *is* a shortage of time. I cannot promise you tomorrow: I cannot really promise you the rest of today, but “now is the well-accepted time”, 2 Cor 6: 2.

I thought these four men in Kings give a wonderful illustration of persons taking advantage of their time of opportunity. This opportunity was given to them against a terrible background, a background when, as it says in the previous chapter, “an ass’s head was worth eighty silver-pieces, and the fourth part of a cab of dove’s dung five silver-pieces”, 2 Kings 6: 25. Things that were worthless in man’s system were given a value. That is, sadly, more abroad than ever it has been, but here was a man, this captain, who says, “Behold, if Jehovah should make windows in the heavens ...”. This man was a sceptic. He doubted God; he doubted God’s word; and he suffered for it; he suffered the righteous judgment of God. If you read the last verse, it says, “And so it happened to him; and the people trampled upon him in the gate, and he died”. We cannot trifle with grace. This man was unbelieving; he was a confirmed unbeliever; he was defiant. But, oh, these leprous men, I think they were humble. They say, ‘if they put us to death, we shall but die’. They accepted that their plight was inevitable. As the hymn says,

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
(Hymn 307),

and He came in for these men. The camp of the Syrians fled. God made them hear the sound of horses and chariots. They thought they were being attacked, and they ran away, and all the wealth that they had accumulated, these leprous men were going to keep it for themselves. You do not need to do that. You must make it your own, surely, but once you know the love of the Saviour, the cleansing power of the blood in the gospel, you can tell anyone about it. It is available for all; it is, "towards all, and upon all those who believe".

Sadly, when they came into the city and carried the message to the king, he disbelieved as well. He said, 'Oh no, it is a plot of the Syrians. It is a ruse; they will come back again'. Oh, dear friend, there are no hidden meanings in the gospel; there are no doubts. The only question is, if you shall believe; the only doubt is on our side. With God there is absolute clarity; there is absolute certainty; there is absolute definiteness; there is total forgiveness; there is total salvation. May every one of us be in the gain of it! May we be like these four lepers! May we lay hold of the opportunity! May we lay hold of the grace of God, and lay hold on the mercy of God, lay hold of the compassions of God! They are towards us, without money and without price. It is like that hymn that we sang at the beginning! "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat: yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price!", Isa 55: 1. That is on our side: the price was paid by Jesus. He had to suffer; He had to die; He had to shed His blood; He had to be buried. Before that, of course, on the cross between the sixth and the ninth hour He had to endure the wrath of God, the righteous wrath of God against sin. Jesus paid that price, and He paid it in full, and He exhausted that wrath, so that for us now all that is left is blessing. The curse is gone; it is laid aside. Sadly, for those who disbelieve, it will come back. I may have quoted it here but many years ago in a preaching in Grangemouth a brother read two words, the last word of the Old Testament, which is

“curse” (Mal 4: 6), and the last word of the New, which is “saints”, Rev 22: 31. He preached the gospel from that, because when you come to the New Testament, the curse has been taken away; it has been borne by Jesus. The price has been paid. For us there is the opportunity to become saints. What does that mean? Saved persons, saved by the precious blood of Jesus, empowered by the gift of the Spirit! That is another precious gift; you cannot overlook the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit makes things real, living and true in our souls.

May we all be in the gain of these things for His Name's sake!

KIRKCALDY

13th September 2020

THE MEDIATOR

Jim R Walkinshaw

Job 8: 20; 9: 1-3, 32, 33

1 Timothy 2: 5, 6; 1: 15

Romans 8: 22-27

It may be evident from the hymn (No 275) and the scriptures read that I have felt led to say a word as to the Mediator. What does the Mediator mean? I suppose in men's affairs it is a person that takes up the cause of a person who may be in difficulty, or has done something wrong, or feels that he is due some retribution, and he pleads his cause with one who perhaps has a certain hold or influence over him or over the other party.

I read in Job because I think Job illustrates for us the situation of a man who is having to do with God and realises that, of himself, the situation is hopeless. So he raises a question here, "how can man be just with God?". His friend had said earlier, "God will not cast off a perfect man", and at the same time he said, "neither will he take evil-doers by the hand". How sobering that is if you think about it! What that suggested to Job was that if Job could find a way of being perfect and doing what was right all the time, then God would take account of him, but at the same time, if he was an evil-doer, if he was a sinner, then God would have nothing to do with him except perhaps by way of judgment. And Job was feeling that because he was going through things. I think that illustrates the situation of every man, woman and child without God. Scripture says, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God", Rom 3: 23. That is you; that is me; that is every man, woman and child on the face of this earth: "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God".

And the question is raised, as Job raises it here, "how can man be just with God?". Have you had some sense in your experience of the hopelessness of your situation if you came face to face with God? That is a very sobering matter. There are men - and when I say men I include women, and children who have reached the age of

responsibility - who would seek to pretend that God does not exist, or at least do “not think good to have God in their knowledge”, Rom 1: 28. Have you ever thought about what it would be if you came face to face with God? That time *will* come. We must “all be placed before the judgment-seat of God”, Rom 14: 10. How sobering that is! Job asks, “how can man be just with God?”. He said, “If he shall choose to strive with him, he cannot answer him one thing of a thousand”. What could any of us say to God in relation to the situation we are in? What Job came to realise was that what he required was an umpire or a mediator. He says, “For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him; that we should come together in judgment”. Then, as feeling the awfulness of the situation he was in, he says, “There is not an umpire between us, who should lay his hand upon us both”. What a terrible situation to be in! What a hopeless state man is in through sin, and Job said there was “not an umpire”, not a ‘mediator’, “who should lay his hand upon us both”. He wanted somebody who could take up his cause before the eye of a mighty God, a God who could not look upon iniquity (Hab 1:13), a God who would judge sin in all its awfulness.

The wonder of the gospel is that there is One, as Paul asserts in this verse that we have read in Timothy. Earlier than where we have read, he says, God “desires that all men should be saved”, v 4. You might say to me, ‘Well, in view of what you have said, how can that be?’. The wonder of the gospel is that there is a Mediator. As our hymn has suggested:

One Mediator, Christ, of God and men,
Who on the tree once died, and rose again.

It is a wonderful matter that there is a Mediator, that is, One who can take up your cause before God and One who has the answer too. Paul says, “For God is one, and the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus”. Think about that: “the man Christ Jesus”! We were occupied with Him in the reading, were we not? What a glorious Man the Lord Jesus is, One who in His Person is God, One who in His Person subsists before all, One who was “In the beginning”, as it says in those verses we read, “In the beginning was

the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God", John 1: 1. How great is the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ! And yet, as this scripture suggests, the Mediator is a man, "the man Christ Jesus". That is the wonder of the gospel, that there was a blessed Man, One who in His Person was God, prepared to come into this scene as a Man and to take up your cause and mine, to take upon Himself all that stood out against you and me before the eye of a holy God, and to settle that matter completely to God's eternal and entire satisfaction.

What a wonderful thing that is that dawns on a soul that is troubled by sin, is troubled by conscience, is troubled by its history: to know that there is one blessed Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour. We might say the *only* Saviour, the only Name. Scripture tells us, "for neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12), the only Saviour, but that Saviour is available in the gospel, and God desires that, through faith in Him and what He has done, all men should be saved. That is God's desire. That is why the gospel is being preached tonight, and I am sure it is being preached in countless places throughout this earth, and God's desire is that you and I and all men should come to know the Saviour Jesus, should know His precious service as Mediator, One who is able to take up your cause and mine before the eye of God and settle it completely.

So, it says here, "the man Christ Jesus". That would speak to our hearts of what it meant to Him to go that way, coming into this world as a blessed lowly Man. John says, "And the Word became flesh", John 1: 14. Paul says He "emptied himself ... and having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself", Phil 2: 7, 8. The gospels, as we read through them, would show what that pathway was, a pathway of perfection, a pathway of infinite pleasure to God, a pathway that did not deviate at all from the will of God and what was in view for Him. Indeed, He says prophetically - we were reminded of that where we were this morning - "thou hast prepared me a body ... Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will", Heb 10: 5, 7. That is the Man that is spoken of

here, the Mediator, “the man Christ Jesus”. Let our hearts get some impression of the wonder of that pathway, the wonder of what it meant to Jesus to come into this scene as Man, come in as a lowly Babe at Bethlehem’s manger! The story is well-known, even to the youngest, but let us see that the reason the Lord Jesus came in was that He might take upon Himself what was outstanding before a holy and sin-hating God, and He went that way in absolute and infinite perfection.

So, to draw from that scripture in Philippians further, it says that He was “found in figure as a man” and He “humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death”, v 8. How affecting that is! That is what it meant for the Saviour. If He was to be preached in the gospel, proclaimed as a Mediator, proclaimed as a Saviour, it meant that that blessed One had to go that way of suffering, had to tread that pathway in obedience to the will of His God and Father, a pathway that led to death. He is the One who came here to die. How touching that is as we see the pathway of Jesus that led to the cross! As the apostle says, “becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross”. If you read through the epistle to the Galatians, you will find another reference to the Mediator there. It comes after a reference to the fact that Christ became a curse for us, a reference, I think, to the way in which the Lord Jesus went. It says “Christ ... having become a curse for us, (for it is written, Cursed is every one hanged upon a tree)”. How touching the way that the Lord Jesus went that this should be so. The scripture says here, “the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all”. Think of what that meant to the Saviour, taken by wicked hands and nailed to the cross, there the object of man’s rejection, man’s ridicule, man’s cruelty and hatred, poured out upon the head of the Saviour there. Think of what that meant to the Saviour! He endured it all; He endured it patiently. Indeed, only love flowed from Him. Hanging on the cross, He says, “Father, forgive them”, Luke 23: 34. Of those very persons that were inflicting such cruelty on Him, He says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. There was One who was prepared to give Himself “a ransom for all”.

Another scripture in Hebrews speaks of Him offering Himself “spotless to God”, chap 9: 14. The One that hung there on the tree as bearing the curse was One who had not sinned, One that was sin apart, “Him who knew not sin”, 2 Cor 5: 21. There was one there that recognised it. There was one man who was crucified next to Him - you can read it in Luke’s gospel chapter 23 - who “spoke insultingly to him”, v 39. He said, “Art not thou the Christ? save thyself and us”; that man got no answer. There was another man who rebuked him, a man that was hanging there for the same or similar sins as the other. He said to the other, “We indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done; but”, turning to Jesus, he says, “this man has done nothing amiss”. Beside him was One who had done nothing amiss, One who was giving Himself, as this scripture says, “a ransom for all”. At the sixth hour there came darkness, “darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour” (Luke 23: 44), three hours of darkness that could not be penetrated. In another place, it says that God “made him sin for us” (2 Cor 5: 21); and the wrath of God, the judgment of God, was poured out upon His head. But here we have He “gave himself a ransom for all” and in those three hours of darkness the question of sin and sins was worked out before the eye of a holy and righteous God and, as made sin on the cross, the Saviour was forsaken of God. He says, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”, Matt 27: 46. That cry received no answer at that point. The blessed, sinless One was made sin, and God poured out His judgment upon His head. The judgment that Jesus bore was exhausted; that judgment was spent upon the head of Jesus; you can know if you will believe that the judgment that was due to you because of your sins was borne by Jesus in His body on the tree in those three hours of awful darkness. That judgment was exhausted by the Saviour and, at the end of those three hours of darkness, He delivered up His spirit; He went into death. He went into death that the penalty of sin might be paid; the penalty of sin is death, and, as the scripture tells us, death rests upon every man. The truth of that is evident all around, even more so in the days in which we are. But that penalty was undergone by Jesus. He went into death that the penalty might be paid, and the

wonder of the gospel is that God was satisfied with that work. He was satisfied by what was accomplished there on the cross, and He raised Him from among the dead the third day; and He has set Him down at His right hand in glory, a Prince and a Saviour, One who is able to save, who gave God the basis “to save completely those who approach by him to God”, Heb 7: 25.

Do you have your faith and trust in Jesus? The scripture says He “gave himself a ransom for all”. I love that. It gives confidence in preaching the gospel because you can say that the Saviour is available to all. The ransom price has been paid. The question of sin and sins has been settled before the eye of a holy and sin-hating God, and the evidence of that is that God has raised Him from among the dead and has set Him at His right hand and is proclaiming now, through the gospel, that Jesus is the Saviour. How wonderful!

Have you laid hold on that? There is one here who did. Paul says in that verse we have read, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first”. What an appreciation he had of the work of Jesus! What an appreciation he had of that precious blood, which was shed on the cross, a witness to that completed work! We might turn to the Old Testament to see the blood that was put on the mercy-seat. Indeed, it refers to it in Romans; God is offering righteousness to all through faith in Christ’s blood: “God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood”, chap 3: 25. The blood is on the mercy-seat, meaning that God has been propitiated in relation to sin. He has given “himself a ransom for all”, and the blood is there, available before God, and it satisfies God in relation to the whole question of sin and sins. Then, as we are often reminded, the blood is sprinkled before the mercy-seat; that is, it is available for you and me to take account of, Lev 16: 14. As John says in his epistle, “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1: 7), and as it says here, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first”.

The first question that might arise in the gospel is whether you realise you are a sinner? There was a man who heard the gospel

once many years ago and we asked him how he got on, and he said, 'Well, I thought it was a very good word that the preacher gave, but what really upset me was when he said that I was a sinner'. He said, 'I am not a sinner. I do not do anything wrong. I live a very good life here'. Do you know, that man was deluded? I trust that in God's ways he came to realise that he was a sinner, a sinner before God, lost and undone. But the wonder of the gospel is that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners", and if you have a realisation that you are a sinner, the gospel would say He is available to you as a Saviour, One who is a Mediator, can put His hand, as it were, on God, and put His hand on you, and you can know salvation and you can be brought in that way right into the very presence of God Himself. Paul says, "Faithful is the word, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". It makes it very personal. As we have said, He is a Mediator; He is set forth by God as a Saviour; and He "gave himself a ransom for all"; that is, that the work that Jesus did there is available to all and if every man, woman and child on the face of this earth put their faith in that work, there is sufficient there to save everyone.

But then, the apostle brings it down closer, more individual. He says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first". Can you say that Jesus has saved you from your sins? Can you say that you are sheltering under His precious blood? Have you some sense in your soul of what it would be to face God in your sins? Yet the wondrous fact is that there is a Saviour available in the blessed Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Is He your Saviour? That is a matter that has to be faced up to in the gospel. How wonderful if you can say He shed His precious blood for me! The hymn-writer says,

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

Can you say that? How wonderful if everyone who hears the gospel tonight can say that, 'Shed for me'!

So, I just close with this reference in Romans. It is a wonderful matter that those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus and know Him as Saviour can know the power and the presence and the help of the blessed Holy Spirit. How necessary that is in this world in which we are! The apostle speaks of it; he says, "For we know that the whole creation groans together and travails in pain together until now. And not only that, but even we ourselves ... groan in ourselves, awaiting adoption". That is, awaiting sonship, awaiting the time when the Lord Jesus will come to take all His own, and we will be taken to heaven to be forever with the Lord. What a wonderful hope the believer in Jesus has! One who knows Him as Saviour, one who owns Him as Lord has this wonderful hope that He is soon coming to take us to be with Himself. You might say, what about the meantime? In the meantime, the Holy Spirit is available. So "the whole creation groans together and travails together in pain until now". How true that is! And as the days go on, you see increasingly how real these matters are, but the wonderful fact is that the Holy Spirit is available and, as it says here, "joins also its help to our weakness". What power is available as we take advantage of the help and the service and the strength that the Holy Spirit provides!

I was asked a question earlier in relation to the Spirit. Is the Spirit a mediator? I said, 'The Spirit is not *the* mediator. There is one Mediator, "the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all"', but what I should have said further on from that is that the Spirit's mediatorial service is very real. The Spirit acts as a mediator. It says here "the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness; ... makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered ... intercedes for saints according to God". What power and help is available in the mediatorial service of the blessed Holy Spirit, One who is able to strengthen and sustain us here, One who is able to keep us in spite of all that has come in and is still coming in, able to keep us in the joy of our salvation. Do our hearts rejoice when the

Lord Jesus is spoken of as a Saviour, when we realise He has given “himself a ransom for all”, and that you have taken advantage of that yourself? He has come to save sinners “of whom I am the first”. And then, as laying claim to what is available in the redemptive power of His precious blood, you may know too what it is to have the gift of the Holy Spirit, come from God as a result of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus there. It says early in Acts, “he has poured out this which ye behold and hear”, chap 2: 33. The Spirit has come as a consequence of the Lord Jesus exalted there on high.

May our hearts rejoice in these things, get a fresh sense of the wonder of the fact that there is a Mediator! Job struggled with that. Of course, he came through in his experience with God. How wonderful that is! But how wonderful in our dispensation to know that there is a Mediator, “the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all”, but then to put ourselves amongst those who accept Him. Again, the scripture says elsewhere, “he bore the sin of many”, Isa 53: 12. Would that everyone hearing the gospel tonight were amongst the “many” who have their faith and trust in His precious blood, owning Him as Saviour and Lord, knowing the power of the Holy Spirit, keeping these things bright in our heart, looking on to that soon coming day when He will come to take all His own to be with Himself!

May we remain in the joy of it for His Name’s sake and God’s glory!

Maidstone

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