

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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CONTENTS

**“He Who, Yea, Has Not
Spared His Own Son”**

Alistair M Brown
Page 1

Desire

Terry W Lock
Page 8

Marah and Elim

Michael J Klassen
Page 15

Faithfulness

Glen M Barlow
Page 19

**The Objectives of
The Glad Tidings**

Kevin R Oliver
Page 26

“In The Spirit”

Lewis J Chellberg
Page 30

“HE WHO, YEA, HAS NOT SPARED HIS OWN SON”

Alistair M Brown

Romans 8: 31-39

This passage was before us last week, and there was an inquiry into verse 32: “He who, yea, has not spared His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all”. It was an affecting inquiry that brought before us something of the feelings of God as to Christ and as to us. I would seek the Spirit's help to say something about what these words convey to my heart, and I am sure to all of us. The passage comes towards the end of a very important line of teaching that Paul follows in the epistle to the Romans. He starts with the moral character of man as away from God, showing what a terrible case man is in, in his sins and away from God; then the apostle brings in God's righteousness, established in Christ, and held forth to men as a mercy-seat. That is our Lord Jesus, the One in whom right God's righteousness is established. Then the apostle explains that, by faith in Him, that righteousness can be reckoned to you, friend, and reckoned to me. He speaks of sins and the forgiveness of sins through the redemption that has been worked out by Christ in the shedding of His blood. How foundational and important Paul's teaching is in the Roman epistle.

Then mid-way through chapter 5, he speaks about sin in the flesh, pointing out that as people after nature we are in bondage to sin, but that God does not intend us to be in bondage but to be set free, again through faith in Christ. Paul teaches us that we are set free through knowing what it is to die with Him, to put to death these deeds of the body. Then he tells us that it is impossible to do that in our own power. God knows that as well, and He has provided the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that takes us on to chapter 8. At the end of that line of teaching, the apostle speaks about God foreknowing us and predestinating us. Then he speaks about being called and justified and glorified.

That brings you up to this passage that we read, and I suggest that is all included in the apostle's expression, “What shall we then say to these things?”. He has been teaching the Romans, and he comes through to the glorious things in chapter 8, the glorious things that God has in mind. God has in mind “that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”, 1 Tim. 2: 4. He certainly does. It is with a view that men - I mean mankind, men and women, and young people -

might come into the blessing that God has in mind for them. That is nothing short of conformity to Christ, and the enjoyment of sonship. The expression “these things” includes that. Romans is a fundamental epistle and what is moral is emphasised; its teaching is essential. But the teaching of Romans also includes the greatest blessings that God has in mind for man. These blessings are available for those that come to Christ in faith and repentance, and they include being conformed to the image of His Son. Is that not wonderful? Does it touch your heart? It would touch the heart, I am sure, of every believer.

The apostle raises the question, 'What are we going to say to these things?'. Do you want to enjoy them? I want to enjoy them, and I want to enjoy them more. I would encourage the hearts of everyone here to enjoy the greatness of the blessings that God has in mind for us. The apostle goes on to say, “If God be for us, who against us?”. The whole power of God is on your side in taking up the blessings that God has purposed for you. In writing to the Romans, the apostle brings assurance into the hearts of those who were reading his epistle. If God is for us, then there cannot be any effective power that is against us. There will be things to be overcome, but it is impossible that the thoughts of God for His own should fail, or that we should be separated from the love of Christ, or that we should be separated from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. As the proof of that, Paul says, “He who, yea, spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him grant us all things?”. That is the proof that the apostle provides to assure our hearts: the disposition of God in not sparing His Son, but delivering Him up for us all. What an encapsulation of the gospel that is! “He who, yea, has not spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all”. What an affecting matter, and Paul brings it in to provide assurance in the hearts of the Roman Christians. If God's disposition towards us is like that, in not sparing Christ, but in delivering Him up for us all, how shall He not with Christ grant us all things?

I would like to say a little about what these words as to God not sparing His own Son convey to me, and I trust to us all. They suggest something of the feelings of God, His feelings as to Christ, His Son; and also His feelings as to you and me. There is what God did in not sparing Him, His well-beloved Son. You will remember that He is the One upon whom the heavens opened when He was baptised, and that when He came up from the waters of baptism a voice was heard, “This is my beloved Son”, and the Spirit came upon Him, Matt 3: 16,17. It was the

only time that had ever happened, that a Man on the earth was marked out by the Holy Spirit descending upon Him as a dove, and abiding upon Him. He is the One who was marked out Son of God in power by the resurrection of dead persons, Rom 1: 4 (see footnote). He was marked out on the mount of transfiguration also, as we know: “they saw no one but Jesus alone” (Matt 17: 7), but they had heard that voice out of the bright cloud, “*This* is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight: hear him”, v 5. How God loves to mark out His beloved Son! What feelings God had towards that One! There are suggestions of it in Genesis in relation to Abraham's feelings for Isaac (chap 22: 2) - suggestions of what it meant for God not to spare His Son. Abraham was told, “Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, Isaac ... and there offer him up for a burnt-offering”. That is what Abraham was told to do. There is the thought of a beloved and only son being offered up, not being spared. In contrast, there is a reference in Malachi to God through the prophet speaking of His people as a peculiar treasure: “I will spare them as a man spareth His own son that serveth him”, chap 3: 17. Every feeling of a father towards a son would be to spare him. And how outstandingly so in one as delightful to the Father as the Lord Jesus was.

The thought of not sparing would also make us think of the words of the hymn that we have sung, 'Unsparring judgment', Hymn 123. There was no qualification, no mitigation, no amelioration, nothing that stood between that blessed One, our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, and the righteous wrath and judgment of a holy God. It would remind us powerfully of these three hours of darkness of the forsaking on the cross, when He was made sin. It has been said that He could never become sin, because of what He was; in all His sinless perfection He could never become sin. But the scripture says that God has made him sin for us, 2 Cor 5: 21. He did that for me. I trust each of us can say that that for ourselves; it was for me. Sin was what He hated, that He abhorred, and He was alone in being made sin. The sweet and blessed communion, that as a Man He had enjoyed all through His life, was broken. He did not have the Father to turn to. “My God”, He said on the cross, quoting Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?”, v 1. He was not spared there. The Father did not spare him. Think of the feelings of the Father, and the feelings of the Son as forsaken and bearing the judgment. We can take up the scriptures that speak of these things and marvel at them.

It is also significant that “the sun was darkened”, Luke 23: 45. Men could not see what happened there on the cross. God looked down upon that scene, upon Christ suffering there, suffering for us. It says, “for Christ indeed has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust”, 1 Pet 3: 18. He was the just One, and He was suffering as though He was unjust because God had made Him sin. But He was not consumed by that suffering. The judgment of God came upon Him, and what compression there was in these three hours, which we cannot fathom nor compass. But the Lord Jesus did; He fathomed these three hours: what it meant for One who was holy and sinless to be made sin! He fathomed that, and He bore it. At the end of these three hours, the judgment was complete. He delivered up His spirit to the Father, “into thy hands I commit my spirit”, Luke 23: 46. What it meant, what divine feelings were involved, what a transaction there was on the cross when God “yea, ... spared not His own Son”! And, as I have said, that was for you and me. I desire that the consideration of these words would have a deepening and sobering effect on my soul. That fathomless suffering, endured there by Christ as not spared by the Father, was necessary because of what I am and what I have done. It was necessary for both, for He bore my sins during these three hours, He bore my sins in His body on the tree; and He endured God's righteous wrath and judgment upon sin. In doing so, He has opened the way for my blessing. We have never, ever to stop being conscious of that and thankful for it. While I do not think we will be occupied with the fact that we are forgiven sinners in the eternal day, we will never cease to give thanks to the One who bore the wrath and the judgment for us. All that enters into the fact that God did not spare His own Son.

We have spoken about God's feelings as to Christ. But He felt as to you and me, too, and He feels as to mankind. It was because of His love for man that He did not spare His Son. He desired your blessing, and the only way that God could in righteousness and holiness bring about His thoughts of blessing for you and me was to give His Son, and not to spare Him. That is what He did. He chose not to spare Christ in order to bring in blessing for poor souls like you and me. We thank God for that. We also thank God that He then received Christ from among the dead. What a victory that was. A great righteous basis had been established by that One, who so pleased God that He raised Him the third day; as it says here, “It is Christ who has died, but rather has been also raised up; who is also at the right hand of God”. What a wonderful matter that is. It demonstrates the delight that

God has in that blessed One, and it also demonstrates and reminds us that Christ is now ascended and is glorified. That One who was not spared has now taken up His life again in glory; But, as we were reminded, He remains a real Man. That is a condition that He took up, and He took it up to maintain everything for the delight of God, and, as the One who is to have the first place in all things, to be the Firstborn of a heavenly race. What results there are from this, that God did not spare His own Son. The scripture says of Him: “he shall see a seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand”. It adds, “He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul”, Isa 53: 10,11. This One who was once forsaken, who was not spared in that period of darkness and forsaking on the cross, is now established at God's right hand in glory as Lord and Saviour. God is righteous to have done that.

Now God has a righteous basis, as the apostle Paul has already said in this epistle, to bless men and to reckon righteousness to you. God reckons righteousness to you as you have faith in the One whom He did not spare. Praise His Name! It also says that He delivered Him up for us all. “Has not spared” and “delivered him up” run together. It would remind us of what is said in the Acts: “him, given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain”, Acts 2: 23. That would affect us too, that God gave Him up into the hands of men. Christ in His blessed perfection accepted that, “but then, not my will, but thine be done”, Luke 22:42. The Lord knew that He was to be delivered up, and His holy soul recoiled from it. In His dependence on the Father in the garden, He asks, “My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; but not as I will, but as *thou wilt*”, Matt 26: 39. Friend, it was not possible that that cup should pass from Him: if you and I were to find blessing, if my sins and yours were to be forgiven, then it was not possible that that cup should pass from Him, but He must be delivered up. He could say later to those who came to take Him, “but this is your hour and the power of darkness”, Luke 22: 53. We also read, “When therefore he said to them, I am he, they went away backward and fell to the ground”, John 18: 6. The Lord in a sense delivered Himself up, in subjection to the will of the Father. What a One He is! All this to secure your blessing and mine.

And then consider what men did. What a commentary on the depravity and hatred infecting man as under the power of sin. Those

who took the Lord and so maltreated Him, and who meted out to Him the mockery of a trial, and nailed Him to the tree and pierced Him did that as under the power of the devil. That is what sin does: it brings people under the power of the devil. People under that power do things that they never thought they would be capable of. How God feels that. He felt that scene at Golgotha as men - Jews and Romans - collaborated to bring about the crucifixion of the Lord. God allowed that: He delivered Him up for us all. Christ was delivered up for all men. While the "all" that Paul refers to here is believers, the work of Christ is available for everyone to put their faith in. What a God we have to do with! What a heart He has! The scope of His love is boundless. God desires to bless every person in the universe, every soul. He "is preserver of all men, specially of those that believe", 1 Tim 4: 10. He desires their salvation. He "desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth", 1 Tim 3: 4. Does that bring assurance into your heart? The God that you know, who was prepared to deliver up His Son for us all, is surely able to bless.

The apostle appeals to those he is writing to. In effect he asks, 'If God does this, could He withhold from you anything of the blessings that He has in His mind for you?' Could He, dear friend? Paul has been telling those to whom he is writing about the activities of the Holy Spirit - the One who is the Spirit of adoption, "whereby we cry, Abba Father", Rom 8: 15. Paul has also written about conformity to the image of God's Son, v 29. If you thought that was too blessed to be possible, Paul says as it were: 'You think about the God, who, yea, has not spared His own Son, but has delivered Him up for us all; will He withhold any of these things from you? No, He will grant us all things with Christ. And that is what God has in mind, that we should be ready and thankful recipients of every blessing that He has in mind for us in Christ; nothing less than that. God wants to bring us to enjoy that, to create in our hearts affections and desires towards Him as the Giver, the One who has done these things that we have been speaking of; and affections and desires towards Christ, by whom and in whom all these blessings are ours.

God also desires us to know the love of the Christ. In another place, the apostle speaks about knowing "the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge", Eph 3: 19. Here He is speaking about the impossibility of anything separating us from the love of Christ. He goes through a list of sufferings of which we know very little, but Paul knew

about them all. He knew about tribulation and distress and persecution. He gives a list of these things in 2 Corinthians 12, which is well worth looking at. Paul knew what he was talking about, and he said that it is impossible that any of these things could separate us from the love of Christ. He quotes from the Psalms as to being put to death all the day long, reckoned as sheep for slaughter, and so on: he knew about that. We know very little of the persecutions that the apostle knew about. He remained steadfast, faithful to his Lord and Master. He knew what it was not to be separated from the love of Christ.

At the end of verse 39 he writes about none of these things being able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We have been occupied with how God, in love for us, has not spared our Lord Jesus, and has delivered Him up for us all. If God was to have objects for His love who were suitable to be in His presence, it was a necessity of both His love and His righteousness that He should deliver Christ up for us. That love, the love of God, was expressed in Christ in an unsurpassable way; there was never love expressed in such a way as at the cross. The results are eternal. What God did at the cross in not sparing His Son has a wonderful, all-encompassing and eternal effect. It means that the future of your never-dying soul as a believer in Christ is completely secure, because God is satisfied. You do not need to worry about whether you are satisfied - although you will be - because it does not depend on how I feel or how you feel: it depends on how God takes account of things. God is satisfied with that One. He delivered Him up for us all. Why? Because He loved us. And nothing can separate us from the love of Christ or the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. As a believer, you are surrounded by love, you are supported by it, and you are enfolded by it. Your outlook is the eternal enjoyment of the love of God, from which we will never be separated. It is not just for time: in eternity believers will enjoy the rest of God, nearness to God, and His love for us in Christ Jesus. It is an eternal, wonderful love that cannot be compared with anything down here.

I commend this to my dear friends and brethren, for His Name's sake.

Loanhead

17th December 2023

DESIRE

Terry W Lock

Luke 22: 14-15

Psalm 132: 13-18

John 17: 24-26

1 Peter 2: 1-3

Nehemiah 2: 11-12 (to 'Jerusalem'); 3: 1-3, 8; 4:6

I would like to say a few words, with the Spirit's help, in relation to desire. It is a very interesting thing, because it is driven by the impulse of the heart. For the children of men it may be some thing that they can look on and see, or something that they want to arrive at, or something that they want to achieve. All of that comes from a desire generated in the heart; it comes from something that they feel after. Speaking very carefully and very reverently, God has operated in the same way; God has done what He has done because of desire. At the very beginning of scripture where He says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1: 26); it was in relation to His heart. It was not just so that He could have one more creature; it was so that He could have an intelligent being with a capacity to love Him according to His revelation; that was the reason for it. It was a desire from His heart that He would have an answer to His love; that is why Adam was created.

So we have all the times, periods, generations of men until you arrive at Christ; and you can understand, when you look back at the history of men and all the failures that there have been, why when Christ came on the scene, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men", Luke 2: 13, 14. You can understand why the angels said what they said; you can understand the beginning of Luke because now God had His Man, One who was absolutely in accord with everything that had been the desire of His heart from before Adam. What a glorious thing the incarnation of Jesus was! Look at it from God's perspective. We tend to look at things from our perspective. Think of what it was for God to see Jesus here as a Man. Perfection in manhood is what God had arrived at. This glorious Man when He was here set out the testimony of God, set out the glory of God, set out the substance of God, set out the desires of God.

So at the end of Christ's life here, before He died, we come to His desire. You might wonder why it is put that way, why He has desire

here, and He puts the desire in relation to the passover. He does not speak of desire in relation to the Supper. You might wonder at that because we are in the day of the Supper; we are in the time when we enjoy what the Supper is on Lord's day morning. But He is with the disciples who were going to go through for the testimony; they were going to be here after the Lord was gone and were going to be the first ones to eat of the Supper that the Lord provided here after the passover. So the Lord says, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you", which was the Lord setting forward in Himself that the feelings of God were not going to change because the dispensation changed. The passover was originally provided in relation to setting Israel - or the saints in type - free, and to give them access to God; and Christ was desirous of showing that according to the feelings of God's heart that was not going to change: "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer". They would know the reality that the love of God that had set out the passover was the same love that was going to set on the Supper. The perfect expression of all that it was going to be for the saints was seen in Jesus: "I have desired" this. What a wonderful Man that He should confirm the hearts of His own before He died. Nothing, as far as God was concerned, had changed; what a wonderful Man; what a wonderful God!

So, "With desire I have desired to eat" has a distinct sense of fervency attached to it. You will find this in relation to the heart of Christ; everything that He does in relation to His own He does with fervent affection. Beloved brethren, there is nobody who loves you like Christ does. That is why, in your own heart, you cannot share the place Christ must have with anyone. His desire in relation to you is nothing but blessing. He has come with the object of bringing you to His God; that is the desire of His heart. But until that day He wants you to know that nothing has changed. And He wanted His disciples to know that. Things were going to be drastically different after the Lord died and rose again; the whole dispensation was going to change. Everything that they had been accustomed to, all the Jewish systems that they had known, all the things that they had been taught, were going to change; but the love of God was a constant - that is what Christ set out.

Then we might go on from that and the reason for it, and come to Psalm 132. Here it is in relation to what God desires. One of the things that is an absolute truth in relation to the life of Christ is that He always considered for God first. Everything He did, every action, every

expression, considered for His God. He came out from God, He was going to God, and He lived for His God. He lived in relation to the desires of His God, speaking carefully. He wanted to establish things for God and subsequently, as coming out from God, He knew what God was looking for in relation to response. He knew what it was going to take to establish it. He knew what it was going to be, that in order for God to have what is mentioned in Psalm 132, in order for God to have His desires fulfilled, Christ knew He would have to come and die.

Jehovah hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it:
Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne;
If thy children keep my covenant, and my testimonies which I will teach them,
their children also for evermore shall sit upon thy throne.
For Jehovah hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his dwelling.

You might ask, 'Why Zion?'. Why not Jerusalem? Jerusalem is connected with the glory of the king, that is David. Zion is connected with the glory of mercy. Mercy is what God spoke of earlier on in Exodus; He had delight in showing mercy, Exod 33:19. Ephesians says, "but God, being rich in mercy", chap 2: 4. God desired Zion because it was the place where He had the opportunity to express His heart in relation to those that would be there.

So it says here -

For Jehovah hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his dwelling.

God is going to spend eternity in the midst of those who have a conscious knowledge of His love and choose to respond to it: "here will I dwell, for I have desired it". Now I trust everybody here loves God. Why do you love God? If somebody was to ask you the question, 'Why do you love God?', what would you say? If somebody in the world said, 'You are a Christian, you are a believer, you must love God; why do you love God?', what would you say? I will tell you why I love God; you will have your own reasons, but I will tell you why I love God: it is because He took me from the worst of circumstances and showed me the brightest of His love in the Man of His choice. I had no right to any of this and He gave me all of it! That is why I love God. What is your reason for loving God? That I know that I am going to spend eternity with that God and respond to the love that He expressed so fully in Christ is the

greatest blessing that my heart and my mind can even conceive. What about you?

So that God desired to dwell there:

For Jehovah hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his dwelling:

This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.

What a wonderful thing it is that God will have a conscious, intelligent, response to His love. That is what marks Zion. There is nothing greater: "but God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us". The greatest thing about mercy is that you cannot deserve mercy; you cannot earn mercy. Mercy is given from a person who has a right over you - may even have the right to destroy you - and chooses not to because of their affection for you; that is Zion. Zion is the place where love operated to create its own resting place, and God has desired to live there forever amidst the persons that He has saved who have come to the conscious realisation of mercy. What an atmosphere! So you can go through the Psalms, read about Zion, and see its bulwarks and all those things, see all of its battlements, the structure, indestructible in every way. Why? Because it is established by the love of God and nothing can stand in the way of the love of God. And then in the centre of it you will find a Man. In a coming day in the centre of the city you will find a Man who will give character to the whole thing, and His name is Jesus.

I read in John 17 because the Lord desires you. He says, "Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". This scripture has been used to speak of the Lord in a relationship of Sonship before the incarnation; which is not something Scripture speaks of. The "foundation of the world" had in view God's purpose; and the Lord Jesus as a Man was going to fill out every desire that He had ever thought of and ever hoped to see; all that was going to come into display in Jesus for God. And the Lord desired that His own should see it, a glory that is particular to Him as a Man the Lord desired that His own should see it the glory that is particular to Him as a Man. The Lord desired that we should see this glory bestowed upon Him, not only because He gives character to everything that is for God, but, beloved brethren, this is the Man that gives the certainty in our souls that we can never ever be moved out of the atmosphere of what God is to us either.

When we see the excellence of Jesus as He is for His God, it settles our hearts; because we understand all rests in what Christ is for God. It gives certainty to the soul that our place will never change before the face of God because of the Man that is there, and not because of what I did or did not do. The Lord has desired this in relation to the saints, that we should take account of His glory; so that we should have liberty to respond to God because of what we see in Jesus. Christ wants us to be settled in our relationships with His God. To think that a divine Person set Himself, came into manhood, and set Himself in relation to your surety of soul is a remarkable thing. It is an act of love and Christ desired it; it was an impulse from His heart.

Then we come on in the light of the things that God has done, in the light of the things that God has desired, in the light of the movements of God because of His desires, to the desires that should be created in us. So I read first in 1 Peter 2 because there are certain things that we lay aside, and I do not want to occupy us with that, but there are certain things that we need to put down, and ways and actions that are better not done, but then it goes on, "as newborn babes desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word, that by it ye may grow up to salvation, if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good". It is not that ye may be saved; it is "that ... ye may grow up to salvation". we may quite often think of salvation only in relation to what it is to be saved from our sins; but it a great salvation for any individual to be saved from themselves. We often think that our actions are the things that we are saved from, which is true, but the greatest salvation, as has already been said, is to be saved from yourself. If you have tasted that the Lord is good you will begin to prefer the kind of manhood seen in Christ. You will begin to be formed by that kind of manhood; and that is where salvation lies, that is where permanency lies, that is where what is for God lies, that is where settled affections lie. So here it says, "if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good". Can you say that you have? Have you desired this? Often we may find, and have found, that for a long time after we are saved from my sins, we do our own will. We go places we should not go, we do things that we should not do, we act in ways we should not have acted; but what saves us from that is if we "have tasted that the Lord is good". You are not going to do it automatically; you have to have a desire for it, because it means you are going to put a whole lot of things down that you found your pleasure in, found your interest in, that you found your life in; you are going to put them down, but you are not going to put them down out of rule: you are

going to put them down because you love Christ more than those things. You are going to put them down because you desire “the pure mental milk of the word, that by it ye may grow up to salvation”. What a wonderful thing.

But then as well as that, there are things that motivate you according to desire that you are going to do for God. Do you have a desire to do something for God? Do I have a desire to do something for God? I thought Nehemiah was a scripture that could relate to this, because Nehemiah had a thing that God had put in his heart; and, beloved brethren, you will seek after God because the Spirit of God has worked and He has created a desire in your heart. So Nehemiah went to Jerusalem, and if you think about Jerusalem as it was in his day, it was a wreck; it had been burned by fire, the gates were off, walls were knocked down, it was a complete disaster, but it was the city of God's king! That was the public testimony of Jerusalem; that is what God had allowed to happen because of the state of Israel. In the midst of all that there was a man that God had put into his heart to rebuild it. We live in a day - and I am using Jerusalem as the analogy here - when the breakdown that is extant in Christendom is very extensive. There has never been a day like it in the whole of the testimony when there is such a need for workmen. In the midst of all this breakdown, who here has it in their heart - the thing that God has put there - to do something for Jerusalem? Well Nehemiah did; he went around the city and checked it all and then he told the people what was in his heart, and they began to build. The reason that I read the parts that I did in chapter 3 in relation to the people is that nobody excused themselves, other than those who did not have the desire, but I did not read about them. We read about the ones who were the priests, and priests were not supposed to have to do this kind of work, but they did. The goldsmiths: was this their trade? No, but they built. The ones after them, the perfumers, was this their trade? Were they stone masons? No! But they did it. Why? Because their hearts moved them in relation to their God. There is no such thing as saying, 'I am not fit for that work, or I am not gifted for that work'. There is no such thing! In the day in which we live everybody is necessary and everybody should have this desire! I feel very tested by what I am saying but, beloved brethren, we are in a day where the enemy has worked very hard to destroy what is for God. Are you going to help build this wall? Are you going to help in relation to the glory of Jerusalem as God desired it? It says on the following page in relation to it, “but we built the wall”; that is, Nehemiah and all those whose hearts

moved them, all the ones who had desire, and it says, "But we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together to the half thereof; for the people had a mind to work". The note to that is note *i*, 'heart'.

Beloved brethren, without laying anything on anybody other than what love would lay, do you love your God enough, do you love Christ enough in relation to all the things that He has desired for you, that it has it created a desire in you to be for Him? Has it done enough that you will govern your life and your circumstances that you should live and build for the God of our Lord Jesus Christ? It is quite a word I know and it is very testing. But the thing that does this, the thing that makes all of this happen, is that this is love answering to love; that is what makes it work. It is not because they were ordered to do this; there are some places in Nehemiah where some built a second section of wall and you might wonder why. It was because they were eager to have it done for their God. Beloved brethren, in the day in which we are where there is so much breakdown, we do not need to live according to the breakdown - we must live amidst breakdown, but we can live in the purposes of God.

May we be exercised to live in the purposes of God, in the things that are for God until Christ comes.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

Birmingham

13th November 2023

MARAH AND ELIM

Michael J Klassen

Exodus 15: 22-27

Romans 8: 12-14

I might just say a little in relation to the Red Sea, where we see that the people of Israel are brought through on dry ground. As we mentioned in the reading, there is the wall there for protection and there is the cloud above. We see every divine feature represented there in deliverance. It is in relation to baptism, Christ's death for us. Then they come to the edge of the sea, and the sea closes back in and the enemy is defeated - all of that the work of God. They stand there at the sea-shore and they praise God, a wonderful effect that deliverance had upon them. What a great work had been wrought in their souls. We each go through those experiences as we move through life and we find that one building block upon another would help to lead us to a greater understanding of this blessed Man, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now they come out into the wilderness for three days and find no water; they had just gone over the Red Sea, come through the Red Sea - it seemed the deliverance that God was able to bring. But then they go wrong; they did not understand that there was more power available. Not only is Christ a Deliverer, but then there is the power of the Spirit of God, in the delivery of the water. They did not see it; they came to Marah and they found no water. What was the commandment that God gave them before they went over the Red Sea? "Jehovah said to Moses ... Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward", Exod 14: 15. You cannot go, cannot be satisfied, in just being delivered.

When you come out of the Red Sea, then you see everything that was opposed to God has been put to death. Are you going to just stop there? Amazing praise is given to God on the banks of the Red Sea. Then the children of Israel go out into the wilderness and into the bitterness of what there is in relation to our walk and way as a believer. We are not speaking about one who does not have salvation now; we are speaking about believers. We find out that they come into this wilderness and they stop straight away. Is it not important in Christianity to know that God has given power to the believer? God is offering to you the power of the Spirit of God. Have you stopped short? How many times I have. Life as a believer is not always easy; as a

matter of fact it might be hard a lot of the time. Why is that? It is because believers stop short, "found no water", Exod 15: 22. You might say there were failures, and then they come to a place called Marah and there was water. Inasmuch as they had gone through the Red Sea, inasmuch as they had seen the deliverance of Christ, inasmuch as they had enjoyed that precious path, they did not have a lot of respect, as it were, for the presentation of Christ by the Spirit. How many times do we find that in our own lives? I come in a bitterness of spirit as to Christ, because I am afraid to submit myself to the will of God; I am afraid that if I fully commit all to the Lord I am going to lose something in this world. As we go on through the history, we see how many times they wanted to go back into Egypt. How quickly we forget the deliverance wherewith we have been delivered.

Moses shows a beautiful feature of an established believer, meekness, because they murmured against him; and he turns to Jehovah. I have thought about how Moses was able to keep his composure. Every one of us will pass through trials, and a lot of them come from the saints. These are the people of God and they are murmuring against Moses. And Moses knows exactly what to do: he cried to Jehovah. This is a wonderful feature of the believer as having come through the waters of Marah: in the midst and the bitterness of life, he turned to Jehovah. How many times do I turn to my own devices with which I might seek to find my way through? Peter gives us so many great examples, as does Jacob, of trying to find their own way. Maybe I will just get the birthright; I know it is mine so I will just go about it my own way. Maybe I will take a few of the sheep because I know they are mine anyway. Maybe I will figure out a way to make them streaked and striped and speckled, and then I can have them. It is not God's way. Does God allow for those things, our shortcomings? It does not change the sovereignty of God; thankfully that is true. But it also does not change the bitterness of soul that Jacob had to go through. You think of how afraid he was of his brother Esau. If he had allowed God's way, he would have had peace about it, but he went about it his own way. God allowed for it, but it was for his exercise. As we do things our own way sometimes, God allows for that. In spite of my own shortcomings God may still bring in blessing. It is in spite of me, not because of me. We see what a wonderful feature that is through the grace of God.

Now God tells Moses, to cast in the wood, which is a picture of

Christ. As we come to the area where the activity of the Spirit of God is, the Spirit of God would say, 'I understand you are going through bitterness of life, I understand that the time you are going through is deep and bitter, but I will tell you how to sweeten this'. It is Christ: He has a way through everything that you will ever need in your life. He has been in every situation of life like unto us, sin apart. Think of that! - you cannot say that you have been through one trial in your life that Christ has not been through. He has met every single thing that the world could throw at us. He was there without food, without support; even the Spirit of God led Him for a time there in the wilderness, and what did He do? He was marked by perfection, being tempted in every point possible. There was no weakness in Christ. Where are you going to go in your bitterness of soul? You must go to the One that knows the way through. Drink of the waters of Marah, after the wood has been put in. As the Spirit of God presents things to us, understand that it is Christ, that He has drawn us to be attracted to. There is not one thing that we can say that Christ does not understand.

We see that, once they had taken on this water; once they had drunk of these sweet waters, then He tests them, with statutes and ordinances, with commandments. The Lord knows, God knows, that I cannot meet any of the commandments or any of the statutes without having the power of the Spirit of God and having perfect confidence in Christ. Now, He is available; now, He can show us the commandments and ordinances; now, they are not onerous to us. How we try to meet some of those commandments and some of those ordinances outside of this kind of power! - it is, beloved, impossible. But by the grace of God, He has given us the power of the Spirit of God to meet the need; and who does the Spirit present? He presents Christ. Through these things now we can walk in these ordinances and in these commandments.

And then we come to verse 27, "And they came to Elim; and twelve springs of water were there, and seventy palm trees; and they encamped there by the waters". You think of an area like that that has been provided. If I might say, these twelve springs of water might be representative of the ministerial work of the Spirit of God, that He has provided everything in order that we might have satisfaction and might have rest. These seventy palm trees might be the work of God in the saints, and we see that, in every blood-bought saint, there is something there representative of the work of God that would overshadow

everything that was opposed to us. I might go through a trial today and it might be this brother that helps me: it might be that palm tree; I might go through a trial another day, and it would be a different brother or sister, another palm tree. This seventy is an interesting number because the Lord says to Peter to forgive seventy times seven. I think there are enough saints to go round to meet every one of our trials. Certainly, we go to Christ, but we see the work of Christ in the saints and each one has passed a different way, but this time it might be that one that can help me meet the trial that I am facing. I do not want to make it seem as though we just go through trials. What I seek to bring before you is that, in this place, there is rest because God has not only provided by the Spirit of God and by the Person of Christ, but He has provided a resting place whereby we might have fellowship and enjoy the love of our Lord Jesus.

I will just touch on that scripture in Romans 8: "So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to flesh; for if ye live according to flesh, ye are about to die": that is the area that we lived in outside of Christ. What hope does an unbeliever have? "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are the most miserable of all men", 1 Cor 15: 19. I do not know of anything, I do not know of any person, who does not face death because of sin. Sin has come in and it has destroyed what God had in mind in relation to life. God was not sold short; what God had in mind was life, and He has brought in a Man who came in; and He died to set aside all that we know in this world - everything, whether it is the trees that maybe live a long time, we still know they die. But God has brought in a Man that died in order that He might bring in life, and here Paul says, "but if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live: for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these* are sons of God". Think of that as the seventy palm trees: those who are "led by the Spirit of God, *these* are sons of God". What a place to come to, to realise that there is now a life that cannot be touched by death. It is such an important feature for the believer, a life that cannot be touched by death, and God has brought that in by the power of the Spirit from the very moment that the Spirit of God worked in your soul. The thought was God's that He might bring in life and bring it in abundantly, that God might be glorified.

May it be so for His Name's sake.

Calgary

17th February 2024

FAITHFULNESS

Glen M Barlow

John 8: 29

1 Corinthians 4: 1-2

Nehemiah 13: 10-13

2 Timothy 2: 1-2

The impression I have been carrying for this occasion is as to the present need for faithfulness. These scriptures in Nehemiah and 2 Timothy have been before us locally recently. They both speak, Nehemiah in type, of the closing days of this dispensation and my impression from them is that a particular activity in which faithfulness is needed in these days, and for which faithfulness is a qualification, is stewardship. That is, caring for the things that have been entrusted to us. We have received very precious things and I think the question, and the exercise, in these closing days is as to how we care for them.

I had in mind to say something first as to what faithfulness is. We know that faithfulness is a divine attribute. God is described in the Old Testament as “the faithful God” (Deut 7: 9), and I suppose we all know the faithfulness of God. When we speak of the faithfulness of God, I think what that means is that He is true to Himself. Faithfulness is to be true to something, and God is true to Himself, He is true to His blessed nature. His faithfulness is celebrated throughout the Old Testament and I think there is a recognition in that celebration, by the children of Israel, for example, that in spite of all that they were and all that they did, God was ever faithful. He was always true to His nature. I think we can draw from that that the motive for faithfulness is love. All that we have, every blessing that is ours, is a result of God's faithfulness to us, that He did not take us up on the grounds of what we are or what we have done, but on the grounds of what He is. He has ever been true to Himself in all that He does; it must necessarily be so, and we can be assured that He always will be.

When we come to faithfulness in man, I think it is no longer a question of someone being true to himself. I think faithfulness in man is being true to God. We sang in our hymn of the 'faithfulness to God' of Jesus, Hymn 230. I was noticing a reference at the beginning of the book of Samuel which I suppose referred directly to Samuel, but surely only had its fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. God speaks to Eli and says, “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is

in my heart and in my mind”, 1 Sam 2: 35. That was Jesus. We have read of Him here in John's gospel, answering I think to what God spoke of in the beginning of Samuel. He says, “I do always the things that are pleasing to him”. I think that is a statement of faithfulness in man in perfection.

I would like to draw out some further thoughts from that statement as to what faithfulness in man involves. It begins, “I do always the things that are pleasing to him”, and, if we take up the exercise of faithfulness, the first thing is that it is individual. It is an individual matter. We know that He was -

Faithful amidst unfaithfulness (Hymn 230).

We know that even if every other man was unfaithful, He remained faithful. We know that this is still true. It says in Timothy, “if we are unfaithful, *he* abides faithful”, 2 Tim 2: 13. What I understand by that is not exactly that if we are unfaithful to the Lord, He remains faithful to us, but that if we are unfaithful to God, the Lord remains faithful to God.

The second thing that I would draw out is that He says, “**I do** always the things that are pleasing to him”. My impression as to faithfulness, and it is a great test for me in the closing days of this dispensation, is that it is not really a matter of what we say, or even really what we hold to be true, but it is about what we *do*. In the Lord Jesus there was always perfect moral conformity in what He did to what He said. Even in a simple practical way, we know that faithfulness to something is a matter of what we *do*. He did “always the things that are pleasing to him”. We are told in relation to His activities as Son over God's house that He “is faithful to him that has constituted him”, Heb 3: 2.

The final thing I would like to draw out is that He says, “I do **always** the things that are pleasing to him”. I think the idea of true faithfulness has one person as object, because when the interests of two persons diverge, a choice would have to be made to be faithful to one or the other. So a faithful person is someone with undivided loyalties. That is not to say that faithfulness does not work out towards others. We know that the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus to God resulted in blessing for men, in blessing for His own, but His faithfulness was always to God. He had undivided loyalties, and whatever the will and pleasure of God required, that is what He did: a faithful Priest who did according to what was in God's heart and in His mind.

Now He has left us a model that we should follow in His steps. We sang that we 'fain would like Thee be'. One of the features in which I think we are called to be like Him is in His faithfulness. I read this scripture in 1 Corinthians because it draws the link to which I referred at the outset between faithfulness and stewardship. It is noticeable that faithfulness here is linked with Paul, and we are told what he and those with him are "stewards of the mysteries of God". As those who have the ministry of Paul, those who have the precious Scriptures, we have in some measure at least, "the mysteries of God". We know His present mind as to what is for the heart of Christ, the body here answering to Him and serviceable to Him in testimony. Paul says that he is a steward of "the mysteries of God", and it is "sought in stewards that a man be found faithful". I suppose we know that if something is going to be entrusted to a person, the first characteristic required of them must be that they are faithful to the person who entrusted it. That I think is the call for us in these days. The call is to be faithful to what we have from God in light as to the truth and as to His precious purposes. That involves those four aspects of faithfulness of which we have spoken: that faithfulness is to God; it is individual, a matter of individual exercise motivated by love; it is a question of our conduct - of what we do; and it requires that we have undivided loyalties.

I had particularly in mind to take up these two scriptures, the first in Nehemiah and then in 2 Timothy, as perhaps bearing out the practical nature of faithfulness in stewardship. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah have been applied to the way that persons were recovered to the truth from the 1800s onwards. So we know that what precedes the book of Ezra is that the children of Israel had been carried away into Babylon, and we could link that with the way that the professing church in this dispensation has been carried away into the world system. Then Ezra begins with a decree from king Cyrus, answered in those whose spirit God had stirred, to come out of Babylon and to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of God. We know about that movement in the late 1820s led by the Spirit of God. A divine decree that was answered in exercised hearts who returned, as it were, to rebuild the house of God, that is to take up the service of God on Scriptural ground, on the ground on which God would have it, away from what man's imagination and thoughts had added. Jeshua and Zerubbabel led them and they have been described as pioneers. So there was the time of the pioneers. Then we know that the history proceeds and several decades later the wall is rebuilt in the time of Nehemiah, speaking to us

perhaps of the way in which the truth of fellowship, and all that it involves as protecting the service of God, was recovered.

But when we reach the passage we have read in Nehemiah 13, it is many decades since those exercised persons returned from Babylon. It was no longer the days of pioneers, and we are not exactly in the days of pioneers now. The question that is raised in these days is how are the things recovered going to be maintained and continued? I think what this passage draws out is that the qualification for that is faithfulness. What precedes the section we have read is *unfaithfulness*. When we consider that faithfulness involves undivided loyalties, what precedes this is a priest with divided loyalties. Eliashib the priest, who should have considered alone for God, had set aside a chamber in the house of God for a relative, a chamber which formerly had contained “the oblations, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine and the oil”. The consequence of that unfaithfulness, I would gather from verse 10, is that the service of God was hindered or perhaps even ceased entirely, because the portion was not available for the Levites and they “had fled every one to his field”. The wealth of the heave offering, the tithes of the corn and the new wine and the oil, what would speak of the enjoyment of the inheritance, what would sustain the Levites in view of service toward God, was not available, because the chamber had been cleared out for another. One who should have considered alone for God, did not. How much these things might come home to us, because I might think that others will take up the exercise as to individual faithfulness and I will be carried along with them, but one man's unfaithfulness here caused the service of God to cease. What a test that is.

Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem and rectifies what had taken place in Eliashib's unfaithfulness, but then in view of the continuance and maintenance of the service of God, involving that these treasuries should be full and the portion should be available, he sets *faithful* men over the storehouses. I suppose that we might think of stewardship as bearing on those who take up particular responsibility. For example, stewardship is linked in the New Testament with the overseer, Titus 1: 7. However, my thought really is that it is the responsibility of *all*. I think this passage might bear that out, because you will notice that the four storekeepers were a priest, a scribe, a Levite and one subordinate to them. It is not a special class of persons that is called to faithful stewardship: it is the responsibility of all. The qualification for these persons to be set over the storehouses was not to be a priest, or a

scribe or a Levite exactly, but to be “esteemed faithful”. And it says, “their office was to distribute to their brethren”, so that individual faithfulness in these closing days results in blessing for the company. It is taken up individually, but it results in blessing for all.

When we come to 2 Timothy, it is noticeable how similar the thought is that is conveyed. Those who were “esteemed faithful” were set over the storehouses in Nehemiah; here the things heard of Paul were to be entrusted “to faithful men”. When Paul spoke in that scripture we read in 1 Corinthians of being “stewards of the mysteries of God”, he referred to himself and those with him. In particular, he speaks at the end of the previous chapter of himself, Apollos and Cephus. Now, we have received the things spoken by Paul. Paul had entrusted them to Timothy, and he refers to Timothy as his “faithful child”, 1 Cor 4: 17. He had confidence in the faithfulness of Timothy, but he had in mind what came after Timothy, that Timothy should entrust these things to “faithful men”. I think there is a particular link in the days in which we are between Paul's ministry and faithfulness.

So the question is whether we are 'with Paul' in that sense. Are we with him? It has struck me increasingly recently in reading through the second epistle to Timothy, which has particularly in mind the individual exercise to be taken up in a broken day, how many persons Paul refers to as to where they stood in relation to himself. We are told “Phygellus and Hermogenes, have turned away from me” (chap 1: 15), “Onesiphorus ... has often refreshed me” (v16), “Demas has forsaken me” (2chap 4: 10), “Luke alone is with me” (v11), “Mark ... is serviceable to me” (v11), “Alexander the smith did many evil things against me” (v14). I think what that might convey, in a scene where unfaithfulness in the professing church particularly relates to the disavowal of Paul's ministry, is that faithfulness is to stand in our conduct for Paul's ministry. That is the place where particularly we get “the mysteries of God”. We have the light by faith of what the Lord Jesus is seeking in these closing days. It involves what the saints were recovered to in those early pioneering days of which we have spoken, in relation to the body here and the Head in heaven, that there should be that which represents Christ, and speaks of Him, in the scene of His absence. We might see the section in Nehemiah as particularly having in mind the service of God, and what proceeds toward God, whereas 2 Timothy relates particularly to the testimony: “Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord” (chap 1: 8), so that it has in mind the aspect

toward man, but both are to be marked by faithfulness.

If we see that the entrusting of these things is to “faithful men”, my impression is that standing for Paul's ministry is a question of what we do. We have been reading Ephesians locally and in the first two chapters of that epistle the mysteries of God are told out in a glorious way, as they are according to the mind of God. Then the third chapter is a prayer, and the fourth chapter begins with an exhortation to “**walk** worthy of the calling”. Paul himself says to Timothy that “*thou* hast been thoroughly acquainted with my teaching, **conduct** ...”, 2 Tim 3: 10. Paul could say that he was an imitator of Christ, 1 Cor 11: 1. In Paul there was someone whose movements were in accordance with what he said. These things Timothy had heard of him; “my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings”. I suppose that faithfulness must involve reproach. It will involve a measure of suffering because we are in a scene of general unfaithfulness. Paul is a prisoner in that sense and his ministry particularly is in reproach. But the call is for faithfulness, and I think these precious things will be maintained and continued if the practical reality of them marks our movements here. Timothy was told in the first epistle how he was to conduct himself in the house of God and it is striking how, throughout Paul's ministry, the most fundamental practical exhortations as to our movements and walk here follow from the exposition of the most exalted truth. That is what Christianity is, it is life and vitality. That is not to say anything against doctrine which is an absolute necessity to have intelligence as to God's mind and what is according to His will, but the reality of Christianity is what we *do*.

I had one further thought as to Matthew 25, where the Lord Jesus speaks of the man who goes away and commits his substance to his bondmen in his absence, v 14-30. I think what that teaching of the Lord Jesus might draw out in relation to the matter of faithful stewardship is that it is a responsibility. It is not exactly presented to us as something that we might take up if we choose, though the motive is love, but it is a responsibility. If we have been given something in His absence, we have a responsibility to care for it. We know in that chapter the Lord's feelings as to the one who did not care for it - hiding the talent in the earth was not caring for it. We see that it is the divine mind that we should take up this exercise for Him, but also I think it is our responsibility towards our brethren. We were reading Leviticus 6 recently, and it is quite striking that when it speaks of the trespass

offering in relation to a trespass against a neighbour, it refers to the way we handle “an entrusted thing or deposit”, v 2. I think we are responsible to our neighbour, our brethren, for the way we handle the things that have been entrusted to us, and whether we hold them faithfully for Him.

What Matthew 25 also brings out in a particular way is that faithfulness comes with a reward. As we have been taught, the reward when presented in scripture is never a motive; we have already said that the motive for faithfulness is love, but it is an encouragement for those already in the way. In Matthew 25, the reward exceeds the faithfulness; “thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things”, v 21. I think that might draw out to our hearts, beloved brethren, the value that the Lord Jesus places on faithfulness to Him in the closing days of this dispensation. May we be helped to take up this exercise that He may be glorified, and that the precious things we have may be faithfully cared for until He comes.

For His Name's sake.

Sidcup

2nd March 2024

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE GLAD TIDINGS

Kevin R Oliver

Acts 4: 33

Romans 8: 28-30

Philippians 1: 17-20

Philippians 3: 8-12, 20-21

John 17: 19-23

The impression one has is in relation to the objectives of the glad tidings. We often think of the glad tidings with reference to the seeking of salvation for sinners such as you and me, and that is certainly a fundamental objective of the glad tidings. How wonderfully precious it is to be cognisant of the Lord who came into this scene “to seek and to save that which is lost”, Luke 19: 10.

Thus we are subjects *and* objects of the glad tidings. This also applies to our fellow creature man; the word is for all. There is one message of salvation that goes out to a wayward generation and has gone out now in this character for nearly two thousand years. Think of God's patient workings, according to His purpose, that urges sinners to come into blessing - “neither is there another name given under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved”, Acts 4: 12.

I was struck as to what is objectively for God in the glad tidings. We often say that, ultimately, all that is transpiring in this dispensation, in part secured through the glad tidings, is for Him. That it is for Him reminds me of how we have been exhorted to seek the divine perspective. It struck me in reading some ministry this week - and somewhat confirmed by what we had in our reading earlier today - as to the matter of the apostles giving “witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4: 33), speaking to how pure and unadulterated the testimony was in the early days in the formation of the assembly. It says, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (v 31) - what was being borne witness to was objectively pleasurable to God . They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they commenced the work of this dispensation by announcing the glad tidings in order to secure God's objectives.

I read these passages in Romans and Philippians because Paul had a wonderful, unparalleled insight to God's objectives in the glad tidings. In Romans, we have the theme of salvation through a personal transaction with the Lord Jesus as Saviour; the One who has taken away our sins and has annulled the penalty, which is death.

What relief and joy comes from having the enormity of this burden removed. I would pause and ask whether all in this room know the reality of this relief, the deliverance from the penalty of death which lies upon every man, woman and child?

Where we read in Romans 8 is where we understand more as to what is objectively for God in the glad tidings. Verse 29 says, "whom he has foreknown, he has also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son". This is the core of one's exercise: not only is the divine objective - and God's desire - that we come under the shelter of the precious blood of the Lord Jesus in which God has declared to us His love, mercy and grace, but that we become "conformed to the image of **his Son**".

This is something one feels very limited in speaking about, but what the Father sees in the believer is a reflection of what Christ is; an attribute undoubtedly of this great matter of conformation "to the image of his Son". God seeks from this generation, as He has sought from preceding generations and will continue to seek from those that succeed us in this dispensation, to have that return in sons that are in conformity with "the image of his Son".

Therefore the objective of the glad tidings is not just a matter of forgiveness and salvation, as great as these matters are, it is a matter deeper than that for the Father; He sees the fruit of the work of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit coming to light in His people and the bringing into conformity of their natures to that of His Son - the One who was perfect and spotless, the One who declared and revealed the Father's love in complete perfection. Not one step was inconsistent with the Father's will. In that sense, just as the Son answers perfectly to the Father, so the many sons are to be conformed with the Lord Jesus - how great are God's sovereign operations!

We also touched in our reading the thought of the Lord Jesus being a model. This linked with my impression for this gospel, the objective of the glad tidings, and He being *the Object*. Speaking reverently, we have Him as a Model in His walk, His disposition, His demeanour. We have a Model whom we can imitate, with the Holy Spirit's power, resulting in pleasure for God now and eternally. It impresses me that in all of this, the great answer and objective for God is secured from the glad tidings. We are the beneficiaries of it because we are relieved from the penalty of death and we come into eternal blessing - life everlasting and the knowledge of eternal life as in

relationship with the Son in the Father's house, but ultimately the Father Himself has His return. And Romans 8 emphasises that there is no uncertainty in this - "whom he has predestinated, these also he has called; and whom he has called, these also he has justified; but whom he has justified, these also he has glorified", v 30.

In Philippians 1: 20 we have a further thought, "Christ shall be magnified in my body whether by life or by death". Paul knew that his sins were forgiven, but spiritual sight allowed him to apprehend what was to be seen in him *consequent* upon his salvation. We often refer to salvation as not simply what we are saved from, but rather what we are saved to. I wonder if this is also what Paul is touching on by apprehending the divine perspective, that Christ should be "magnified" in his body. May we each know something of this great matter!

Philippians 3 pertains to what we leave behind as coming into the joy of our salvation. "I count also all things to be loss ... and count them to be filth, that I may gain Christ; and that I may be found in him, not having my righteousness, which would be on the principle of law, but that which is by faith of Christ", v 8. Paul's epistles, particularly Philippians, illuminate the apostle reaching the joyous heights of his salvation; he anticipates the prize and being perfected; and he says that he would rather be with Christ, that that would be gain. But he is satisfied to remain here to secure more of what ultimately would be objectively for the Father's glory. I raise that for each one of us, that we may be more elevated in our thoughts as to what is for God resulting from the glad tidings, so that we might lay aside what would occupy us in this scene, and "pursue", so as to move forward in the testimony, "I pursue, looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus", v 14.

Philippians 3: 21 re-emphasises the end result that is for God - the transformation of "our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory, according to the working of the power which he has even to subdue all things to himself". In simplicity, transformation renders us Christ-like. We apprehend this now by faith, but in time it will take place in actuality. In the waiting time, let us gaze upon where He is; to have our eyes on that Model. The apostle Paul appeals that his followers should be his imitators - he had laid hold of the truth of conformity to His body having judged his body of humiliation such that what was seen of Christ in him could be imitated with a view that the Father should be glorified.

John 17 further illustrates the objective that is in view for God - "that they may be all one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us". And then Jesus says, "the glory which thou hast given me I have given them". We see there the expression of the divine intent and objective; all that has been secured in love and righteousness by the offering in perfection of the Lord Jesus. Alongside the oneness of mind of divine Persons, the end result should be in the fullest extent what is Christ-like in us, and in union. We often say we will never be deity, but may we rejoice in the fulness of the divine objective and what God has secured in persons that display features of Christ. Maybe we often feel our display of those features may be small or fleeting, but they are formed in perfection. Think of the holy city, new Jerusalem, in Revelation 21, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (v: 2); the foundations of its wall "adorned with every precious stone" (v 19), each with variation, but as one whole reflecting the glory of Christ and what is suitable for Him.

It is a simple impression; may the Spirit furnish this further as we contemplate these scriptures. The objectives of the glad tidings are both to secure salvation for sinners like you and me, and further to secure for the Father sons conformed to the image of His only-begotten Son.

May the Lord bless the word.

Denton

3rd December 2023

“IN THE SPIRIT”

Lewis J Chellberg

Revelation 1: 9-10

John 14: 15-17, 25-26

I would like to draw attention to what John says in Revelation as to being “in the Spirit”. There are several other verses as to the Spirit in the section in John, and I was not sure which verses exactly to read, but I am exercised as to this thought of being “in the Spirit” that we have in Revelation 1. I would just say (to myself more than anyone) that it is a state that we should desire to be in more. I do not think it is something that was exclusively for John. It is a state that we can enter into, and should enter into.

So what does it mean to be “in the Spirit”? I am sure there are a lot of ways we could look at it and there may be thoughts that come to mind which would be good to follow up, but I believe that *primarily* the Spirit desires to direct our thoughts to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what the Spirit's attention is upon, if I can put it that way speaking reverently; that is what His focus is on. Being “in the Spirit” is a state when we are entirely focused on Jesus, on Christ. We are not thinking of ourselves, not thinking of our need, not even thinking so much of God in a general sense, but thinking of Jesus specifically, *that* divine Person. I am sure the brethren know well the verse in Hebrews 12: 2. There is a footnote there about looking on Jesus, having our eyes fixed on Him and it speaks of 'fixing the eye exclusively on one', that is on one person, on one thing. I think, to put it simply, that that is what being “in the Spirit” is. I am sure there is a wider thought than that, but I would like to speak simply about this because the thought is that we *can* be in that state and *should* be in that state more.

I read these other verses as to the Spirit to expand a little on this thought. He is given this title of Comforter. As we know, there is a helpful footnote here too; it speaks about one who helps us as to our affairs here on earth, see footnote John 14: 16. That is what the Spirit does, He helps us; He is a divine Person sent to help us, and I think in relation to being “in the Spirit”, the Spirit *Himself* will help us in that, in being in that state! If we focus our eyes, focus our attention, and focus our thoughts on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit will help us from within. As it says here, “he abides with you, and shall be in you”. Speaking for myself at least, I do not appreciate enough what that means that He shall “be in you”. It is not just that He is a divine Person we can call upon for help (although we can), but He is *in* us. I think that is important to

draw to our attention being “in the Spirit”. He will help us from within. If we focus our attention on the Lord Jesus Christ, to put it simply and carefully, He does the rest. The Spirit will help us to be in that state.

We read further in John 14: 26, that “*he shall teach you all things, and will bring to your remembrance all the things which I have said to you*”. It is important to note that it says, “all things” twice in this verse. The Spirit is so great that He can bring to us *everything* that God desires to open up! He can help us understand everything - this whole book, the whole Bible, the whole of Scripture, the whole truth. The Spirit is the One who *can* help us and *will* help us understand all things. *Our* part and responsibility in that (and how we make room for the Spirit, which we speak about a lot), requires that we focus our attention on Jesus, on Christ. I think *that* is the key to all of it.

In relation to how we apply these things currently, one thing would be in relation to our meetings together, and also specifically in relation to the Lord's supper. Being “in the Spirit” is important, particularly in relation to that occasion. Again, the way that we do that is by focusing our attention and our thoughts on Jesus. The Spirit will help us from within to become in that state of being “in the Spirit”. *That* will open up everything else to us, “all things” as it says. Additionally, in relation to our walk here (our pathway), and things that we might need help with, decisions that we might need to make, or situations where we might look for God's will to be made known, focusing our attention on Jesus is how we get through those things and receive divine direction. It is not so much that we are looking for a *specific* answer to what we think we need (although it is right to look for an answer to prayer), but I think our focus should simply be on the Lord Jesus Christ. Then we can be in that state of being “in the Spirit”. That is when God speaks to us and can open things up to us, as it says again, “all things”.

I say these few things that we may be encouraged to make room for the Spirit and be “in the Spirit” more by focusing our attention on Christ, for His Name's sake.

Word in a Ministry Meeting, Wheaton

8th February 2024