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Living Water

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EDITORIAL

With this issue, this magazine commences the tenth year of publication. Looking back, I am led to give thanks to the Lord for the continuous flow of articles which has enabled the magazine to continue; for the help of so many who correct, proof read, transcribe addresses and the like; and for the service of those who minister the word and on whom the “Recent Ministry” section depends. In connection with this latter category, this is the real labour which lies behind this publication for the labour of ministering the word of the Lord is far greater than any work involved in publishing it.

I give thanks, too, that the Lord is pleased to use the magazine for the encouragement and help of His people. One evidence of this is that from time to time readers say that they have found particular help from a specific article. To mark the tenth year of “Living Water” it is intended in the next few issues, if the Lord will, to republish some of the articles from the first two years of the magazine which have been identified in that way by readers. The series commences in this issue with “Things we ought to do — Feet washing”, an extract from an address by James Strachan given at Peterhead on the last day of the year in 1992 and published in “Living Water” number 4.

If readers wish to suggest other articles from issues numbers 1 to 12 which they would like to see reprinted, I would be very glad to hear from them. (The address of the Publishing Trust is given on the inside of the front cover.)

I want to take this opportunity to record my particular thanks to Tim Knappett of Croydon for his constant support and work from the very beginning, in transcribing tapes, scanning in articles and in formatting the final version of each magazine. This work has been invaluable and without it this magazine would cease to appear.

In whatever time is left before the coming of the Lord, I would ask for your prayers that the Lord may continue to use the magazine to bring help to His own and that He may guide in what is published in it.

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS — CHAPTER 9

(Highlights of a Bible reading)

This chapter continues the theme of the righteousness of God. In the first eight chapters we have seen the righteousness of God in dealing with sins and sin and now we see the righteousness of God in dealing with Israel and the Gentile. All is perfect righteousness from God's side.

We can understand the difficulties that Paul is addressing here, for a godly Jew would have understood from the Old Testament scriptures that the blessings for the Gentiles would flow out through Israel, yet Israel had been set aside and the Gentiles were being blessed. The Jew, as having rejected Christ, is set aside, for the time being, in God's ways.

The first promise of the Lord's incoming was to the woman at the beginning of Genesis before there was Jew or Gentile. Then we find the call of Abraham and the choice by God of a particular nation, Israel. So as we go through the Old Testament the Lord is spoken of prophetically as the prophet and the king who is to come. It is light that was given to the Jewish people and it was clearly prophesied to them that it was from among them that He would come. It is really the fulfilment of the first promise that God gave to Abraham. "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 28:14). That looked on for its fulfilment to the coming of Christ. There is a solemn aspect to all this in that it teaches us that the greatest favour can lead to the greatest darkness and ignorance. "He came to his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).

In the first few verses of the chapter Paul is expressing the very deep feeling he had for his brethren according to flesh. He was ready to go to extraordinary lengths that they might come into the blessing of christianity. No doubt, what he says here was the same kind of spirit that led him at a much later date to go up to Jerusalem for the last time. We cannot have such feelings. We should feel for our fellow men but there is no reason why we should feel for Jewish people more than for anyone else. Paul had such feelings and so as we see in the Acts of the Apostles when he came to a place he often went first into the synagogue and spoke to the Jews.

What opens up in chapter 9 of Romans however is that all is of divine grace and that anyone who claimed anything from their natural origin was on a dangerous footing. Jews were going to need grace as much as anyone else. Even according to the line of nature not everyone born of Abraham was of the line of promise. It came down through Isaac then through Jacob, despite what he was. In this way, even the Jew had to acknowledge the sovereignty of God.

There are eight remarkable features listed in the chapter as marking Israel: the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the law-giving, the service, and the promises; whose are the fathers; “and of whom, as according to flesh, is the Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever” (vs.4 & 5). These were very real tokens of God’s dealings with Israel. It is sobering to realise that none of these features, generally speaking, profited Israel. The same applies to us. Everything depends upon the acceptance or rejection of Christ. However precious the history that we have inherited, that in itself can do nothing if Christ is not accepted. In the next chapter we read: “For with the heart is believed to righteousness; and with the mouth confession made to salvation. For the scripture says, No one believing on him shall be ashamed” (Romans 10:10-11).

When Paul comes to “the Christ” he moves immediately on to claim a much wider realm than Israel and he bursts out, “who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen”. At the beginning of John’s gospel we read of one who was similarly affected: “Nathanael answered and said to him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49).

Paul raises two questions here: ‘Had the word of God failed?’ (see v.6) and, “Is there unrighteousness with God?” (see v.14). Jewish believers may have been puzzled and distressed to see that things had not worked out the way they had believed it was prophetically said to work out. Like those two going to Emmaus (Luke 24), many believing Jews may have been looking for earthly glory.

Particularly when we are faced with God’s sovereignty, we may find such questions arising in our hearts, yet we have to acknowledge that, because of who God is, whatever He does is right.

Paul speaks here of vessels of mercy before prepared for glory. Ephesians expresses the idea of divine choosing even more strongly, speaking of believers

as chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Verse 11 of our chapter shows that the choosing is not because of anything on our part. Before we had done anything either good or worthless, God made His choice. It proves that blessing from God is never, ever, on the basis of something that I can do; everything is based on the work of Christ. That is intended to humble us to the dust and cast us utterly on God. It is also intended to bring anyone who thinks they can work their own salvation to see the worthlessness of such ideas.

The overriding truth of this chapter as to the side of our responsibility is as recorded in chapter 11, “God hath shut up together all in unbelief, in order that he might shew mercy to all” (Romans 11:32). Every one stands in need of mercy. Mercy is in fact available to all. The question for me is whether I accept and receive it.

We sometimes wonder how God’s sovereignty affects our prayers since God both knows and has planned the end from the beginning. Yet there are many scriptures which exhort us to pray and the Lord taught the disciples to do so. One purpose of prayer is that we find out what God’s will might be and subjugate our will in accordance with that. The greatest pattern of all is the Lord in the garden of Gethsemane, saying, “not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42). As a result of prayer we get some impression of what God’s will is and therefore, as in tune with that, we have some better concept of how it is to be achieved. When we pray we must always add in spirit, if not in words, ‘if it be Thy will’. If we are asking for something which is not God’s will it will not come about. This is borne out in John’s first epistle where he says: “if we ask him anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

In preaching the glad tidings the preacher is not thinking of God’s sovereignty, except in so far as he relies on the Holy Spirit, rather than himself, to make good the word in the hearts of those that hear. The preacher speaks for God and desires, as God does, that “all should be saved and brought to a knowledge of the truth”. A preacher does not know how God will be working as he speaks. He is but a servant; it is not his to know who is to be saved. In our chapter in verse 23 it says: “that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory, us, whom he has also called”. There is sovereignty and it is an established sovereignty. But

we must be available to announce the glad tidings to all. The Lord Himself said, 'Go and preach to all'. The side of sovereignty is God's matter and is a secret as far as we are concerned.

Sovereignty is never presented in Scripture as a cover for doing nothing — for failing to pray or declining to preach. We are left here as responsible people. The Lord left His own here that way. He taught them to pray, He told them to preach and He told them to go into all the world. They did those things and God blessed them. We do not know who is going to be saved and indeed we have no right to make up our minds about who is going to be saved or not saved. That is not our matter.

We need to keep these two concepts of divine sovereignty and human responsibility quite separate in our minds otherwise we fall into confusion. It is quite clear that God has "vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory". From God's side it is a fixed matter. We learn how to keep these things in balance from the apostles themselves and the way that they acted.

The sense of mercy in our souls is deepened as we recognise His sovereignty — that of all persons He should have chosen any one of us for blessing brings home to us the depths of His mercy. Mercy is in fact available to all, "For God hath shut up together all in unbelief, in order that he might show mercy to all" (Romans 11:32). It is good to look upon each one of us in this room as being numbered among those in whom God has wrought, "vessels of mercy, ... us, whom he has called" (vs. 23-24). Both Jew and Gentile could find a way into it.

Perhaps it was a bigger thing for the apostle Paul to have written these things than for us to read them. He had to learn as a Jew himself that God was no longer dealing only with His earthly people. Paul himself had to be brought into something new. As he quotes here, "I will call not-my-people My people; and the-not-beloved Beloved". It is wonderful that in the sovereignty of God we should have been brought in and that He should be forming out of various people, one new body, the church! We should thank God for His sovereignty. He has set Israel aside and He has taken Jew and Gentile and set us together and He calls us, "My people", "My beloved". That is God's sovereignty. He has a right to do that. Sovereignty is a very wide thought. It embraces His government, discipline, grace, and mercy. It is a demonstration of God's

rights. God has a right to be sovereign. He is the only being who really has such a right. Nebuchadnezzar was a great ruler but he had to learn that “the Most High ruleth over the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Daniel 4:25); and that, “none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (v.35) We have no grounds to question God’s right.

Paul understood the sovereignty of God in a special way because of his own history and the way that he had been brought on to the christian path. Ananias initially questioned God’s sovereignty but then he accepted it and what a blessing has flowed out of his acceptance.

When we read the passage in Hosea (Hosea 2:23) which Paul quotes in verse 25 of our chapter, it refers to something that is to happen to Israel in a time still to come. (The passage in fact contributes to our understanding of what will happen to Israel after the rapture of the church.) Yet Paul, by the Holy Spirit, takes it up in a different way and applies it to what God is doing now in bringing in the Gentiles. All this brings out that God is in control. God does what is right according to His own righteous will. He is not governed by time; He is the creator of it and it is a tool in His hand.

The chapter goes on (v. 26) to speak of, “Sons of the living God”. It is an unusual expression since mostly in scripture the term ‘Sons of God’ is used but here it is sons of the living God. It seems that the sons are to be marked by the character of God Himself. The Lord’s life here was a witness that there is a living God and there is to be a reflection of that in our lives — a witness that there is a living God. Whatever men might think, whatever they might say, they should see a testimony in the life of a believer that there is a living God.

The christian’s life should be a living one. We see it in the path of the Lord. His was a life of immense activity. A believer’s path, in like manner, should be a continual response to God’s call. It is very testing. We are in this world of which Satan is the god and prince and it is sadly evident in the lives of many that he is their god. Well, God would have an answer to that in the life of those who believe. We find a reflection of it in Stephen. He was stoned but we see the power of God shining in that man in his asking the Lord to forgive them. There was no bitterness, anger, or hatred, just the love and power of God shining in Stephen. Stephen was one who lived up to the calling.

Based on Readings in Bromley, Kent, October & November 2001.

JAMES AND PAUL

**“...for we reckon that a man is justified by faith, without works of law.”
(Romans 3:28)**

**“Ye see that a man is justified on the principle of works, and not on the principle of faith only”
(James 2:24)**

What looks like a square and a triangle at the same time? A pyramid! Viewed from the side it looks like a triangle. Looked at from above, it looks like a square. This illustration should help us better understand the statements of Paul and James when they write about saving faith; they are not contradicting each other — they are looking at faith from different perspectives. Paul is looking at faith from above, from the divine perspective. God knows the quality of a person's faith without having to see the results. Before God, the quality of a person's faith is not determined by, or dependent on, good works. James on the other hand is looking at faith from ground level, from the human perspective. We cannot see the heart, as God can, but we can see the results in the life of a person who claims to have faith. True faith will prove its profession by good works.

From God's perspective, the faith that saves is apart from works. From our perspective, faith results in good works which people can see.

Abraham as an example

The fact that both James and Paul used Abraham as an example is significant. Both authors quote Genesis 15:6: “And he believed Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness”. It is important to see how each author uses this verse in his argument. Paul's point is that Abraham was declared righteous by God even before he was circumcised and long before the law was given. In other words there is nothing that Abraham did to earn his salvation. He just believed God: “For if Abraham has been justified on the principle of works, he has whereof to boast: but not before God; for what does the scripture say? And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:2-3).

James' point on the other hand, is that Abraham's faith was shown by his works. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered

Isaac his son upon the altar? Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and that by works faith was perfected. And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (James 2:21-23).

But notice that James does not say that Abraham’s works of faith resulted in God’s declaration of Abraham’s righteousness. No! The declaration was made in Genesis 15:6, about thirty years before his work of faith in offering up Isaac (Genesis 22). That is why James says precisely that the “scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”.

So we see that there is no contradiction between James and Paul. The works of Abraham were essential, not because they had some kind of intrinsic merit to justify him but because they proved the genuineness of his faith. The point is clear in both James and Paul that Abraham was justified in God’s sight long before any works of righteousness were performed.

More from Paul

When considering what Paul has to say about the relationship between faith and works, it is important to bear in mind what he wrote in his other epistles. For instance, in Galatians Paul wrote, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any force, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6). That last phrase, “faith working through love”, sounds a lot like James! Paul was not opposed to good works; it is just that they must be seen for what they are — evidence of saving faith, not the essence of saving faith.

When we quote the well known verses of Ephesians 2:8-9 as a proof text against the false teaching of salvation by works, let us not forget that Paul also wrote the very next verse as well: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works”. Clearly Paul was not against good works. The purpose of his words to the Romans was to remove any idea that a person might be justified on the basis of meritorious works. We can do absolutely nothing to merit favour with God. We are saved by grace through faith alone.

More from James

When thinking through what James says about the relationship between faith and works, there is another important point to keep in mind. The works that James presents as examples from the lives of Abraham and Rahab are, from a human viewpoint, anything but good works. Apart from faith, these works were attempted homicide (Abraham) and treachery (Rahab)! These works are a far cry from what we normally consider good works. These works of faith of Abraham and Rahab were not meritorious good works because, apart from faith, they would certainly not qualify as good works at all! So it is obvious that James is not claiming that the works of Abraham and Rahab added to their faith. His point is that the works of Abraham and Rahab proved that their faith was genuine — the works were a result of their already existing faith.

It is also significant to see how James begins his discussion of faith and works: “What is the profit, my brethren, if any one say he have faith, but have not works? can faith save him” (James 2:14)? In other words, anyone can say they have faith but such a profession may be words only. Can that kind of faith save a person? The answer is obviously a resounding, ‘No!’ A faith that gives mere intellectual assent only is no better than the belief of the demons, as James goes on to say in chapter 2:19. That kind of faith does not save anyone.

Then what kind of faith does save a person? James answers that question. It is faith that shows itself to be genuine by works of obedience. The works themselves do not participate in the process of justification but they are evidence of the kind of faith which is necessary for justification. The heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 did not just say that they had faith and they did not just have a belief about God in their heads! Their faith involved their hearts and evidenced itself by “works of faith”.

What James says is a warning for certain loose-living individuals who claim that they are on the way to heaven because they ‘went forward’ at an evangelistic meeting or ‘signed a card’ or ‘prayed the sinner’s prayer’ but who have no evidence in their lives of a genuine faith.

David R. Reid

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THE COMING OF THE LORD (1)

Hourly draws the day-break nearer,
Soon revealed the coming Lord.
Filled with hope, His own are waiting,
Trusting in His faithful word.

In this world where He has left us,
Even here, we've learned His love;
Nothing less could be fulfilment
Than to be with Him above.

Eager eyes look off to Jesus,
Longing hearts await His voice;
Then the living hope is realised,
In His presence all rejoice!

Alan Waters

THE COMING OF THE LORD (2)

There is a land untouched by ill,
Wherein no grief can come:
Christ, every part with glory fills,
God's perfect will is done.

The One who once was humbled here,
Dwells there in perfect love,
And draws our hearts and bids us now
To seek the things above.

O how we cling to earthly things,
Are loath to let them go,
Though oft they disappointment bring
And joys are mixed with woe.

Come blessed Lord, we cannot rest
Where Thou hast been denied,
And teach us if we're left a while,
Our hearts in Thee to hide.

Alan Waters

IS THIS THE YEAR?

Is this the year when the Lord shall come?
Jubilee year of release;
When we are called to our heavenly home,
God's rest, and eternal peace!

Is this the year when we see His face?
The year we shall hear the shout?
To dwell with Him in that home of grace,
And never shall we go out!

Is this the year we shall all be one?
United in Christ above!
By God-given faith in Christ the Son,
Fruit of His eternal love!

Is this the year of hope fulfilled,
When the flock is gathered in?
When the cry of the longing heart is stilled,
Released from the ways of sin!

Is this the year of fullness of joy
Where Christ is there supreme?
Where praise and worship are our employ
And the love of Christ our theme!

Is this the year we'll begin to sing
Heaven's great and endless song?
To Him that loves us — let heaven ring
With joy from that blood-bought throng!

E. L. G. Clist

PAST — PRESENT — FUTURE

My past! how depraved! A soul still unsaved,
A conscience oft roused, yet fettered by sin,
A will unsubdued, though heart and mind craved
And sighed to have filled, the dark void within.

My present! All changed, through trusting in Christ,
My conscience is purged, my will is at rest,
My mind is renewed, my heart is sufficed,
My soul grace has saved, enfranchised and blest.

My future! 'Tis bliss! what prospects are mine!
“Caught up” with Thine own — with Thee to appear
And reign when both earth and heaven combine
Thy praise, Lord, to swell throughout every sphere.

Samuel Carter

MY IDENTITY COMES FROM JESUS CHRIST

In 1962, at the age of fifteen, I dived off the Port Lincoln jetty into shallow water. There was a black flash, I floated to the surface and endeavoured to stand up. The only response was a tingle throughout my body and I knew I was in trouble; I knew that I was drowning. While holding my breath I experienced flash backs to many of the things I had done wrong. Eventually I had to breathe and gasped in a great deal of water — no coughing, no pain, no fear but I knew I was going to die.

My experience of christianity up until this time was limited to a little bit of Sunday School and the church youth group but in my mind I said, ‘God help me’, or ‘Jesus save me’. I cannot remember which. (I soon forgot all about this, but when I did make a conversion commitment five years later, I remembered it immediately.)

So in 1962 I became what is called a C3/4 quadriplegic. (This means that the third and fourth vertebra is where my spinal cord was damaged.) Such high level breaks usually leave people with almost no movement.

I spent a little over a year in hospital building up what muscle movement was left. Then I went home in fear of there being nothing ahead for me. A young lad asked me to draw him a picture; showing him my hands I explained that I could not hold a pencil. The next day I attempted to draw a line with the pen in my mouth and to my surprise it was straight. So my career as a mouth painter began. I now work with the Mouth and Foot Painting Artists Association and have done so since 1974.

In 1966 I returned to the hospital as a long-term resident. There as a young man I discovered nurses, parties, fast cars and alcohol. For a while I was probably drunk twice a week and mixing it with the best of them.

1967 was the beginning of my real life. There was a gardener, Max, at the hospital. He was a Pentecostal but he did not only speak of healing but of salvation being available in Christ. Max convinced me to read the Bible. I was brought up to respect my elders — everyone else just laughed at him — so I read the New Testament for about three months. I set God a whole lot of silly little tests during this time. I will not say what they were, because I think that God works differently with every person. Each test I gave God, He would give me the answer I wanted. Eventually after reading the New Testament a couple of times I was convinced that Jesus was who He claimed to be and that God was real (not that I had actually doubted it).

In February 1968 Max started to ask me to come to the church at the Christian Revival Crusade. At first I refused, but later I agreed. I was surprised to see a church full with 400 people. It was a straight-forward gospel-type service. When they said, 'Would you come forward and give your life to Jesus', I really wanted to. I felt an incredible burning in my heart. It was unbelievable. But I would not do it in front of all those people. During the next week I thought about it a lot. On Sunday I went to the church again. I had the same experience, this burning ache. Over the next week I came to the conclusion that I had to go forward and make a public commitment. The next Sunday there was a missionary speaker. I have no idea who he was or what he spoke about. All I know was that at the end of the sermon the invitation was given

and I asked Max to take me up to the front. The Pastor prayed for the group that came forward and then a young christian policeman talked me through what I now call the narrow gospel (how people come to Christ, this is what Jesus has done for you, will you make a commitment to Him and ask forgiveness on the basis that Jesus died for you and ask Jesus into your life?) For me the broad gospel is the whole counsel of God fixed firmly in Jesus.

I prayed a simple prayer and it was as though someone had turned a light on; an unbelievable change occurred. Trees looked different, my eyes were really open and the transformation was remarkable. I stopped swearing, drinking and smoking. I was on an incredible high for three days.

During this time a relationship was developing with a nurse, Avriel Saunders. She was a christian but I could not tell her of my experience at first because I had put her through all the difficult questions (I was doing the searching thing) and she could not answer them sufficiently for me. So great had been my own experience that it left me unsure whether her faith was real! Eventually I told her and it enhanced our relationship greatly as we grew in faith together.

Church with Max continued and some of the young people did help. After about six months, it became obvious to them that I was not being physically healed or speaking in tongues and the young people began to lose interest in me. It was about that time that Avriel invited me to her church. I have never felt so welcomed in a place in my life. The young and old took me on board. They would get me in and out of the car, help me with my urine bag, pick me up at the hospital and take me to church. They welcomed me into their youth group. There was just amazing acceptance.

One thing God did for me, and for which I am ever grateful, was to place a desire in my heart to learn. The first year of my faith walk involved a correspondence course through the Adelaide Bible Institute.

Avriel and I were married in 1971. As a teenager I lost everything; now, as a christian, I have everything in Christ. He has given me my identity, my motivation for life and a beautiful wife. What more could I have?

Glenn Barnet

SECRET PROBLEMS — HARD QUESTIONS

Many people, especially the younger ones, weigh over the various problems that arise in this life of ours and are often confronted with questions quite beyond their power to answer. In vain they look around for someone in whom they could confide and to whom they could make known their difficulties. Infidel thoughts arise in the heart, fanned by the open agnosticism which abounds to-day; doubts as to many vital truths of christianity, which they would not utter, crowd into their minds.

This is the Devil's opportunity. 'Give it all up; have a good time and enjoy yourself. Be happy and free', he suggests. Beware of the tempter's snare! Would you be happy if you stepped out of the light of the revelation of God in Christ into the dark gloom of hopeless agnosticism? Would you be free by giving up all that is precious, holy, and true for the blindness of unbelief in darkness and distance from God? Never!

What is the remedy? There is only one, and that is to bring your difficulties to Christ, the Son of the living God. He is the Sun whose beams dispel the darkness of unbelief. He is the true Solomon who can answer all your hard questions: "Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God".

Get alone with Him and, on your knees before Him, tell Him all the truth. Unburden your heart into His ear as to One perfectly sympathetic with your need and perfectly able to dissolve all your doubts. Do not keep anything back. The secret you keep back will be your hindrance. He would encourage you to entrust to Him every secret of your heart, every difficulty of your mind.

Then approach the word of God not with the pride that would claim ability to judge it, but with a readiness to let it judge you. Remember, we are of a fallen race, and that with the fall man's mind came under the power of sin and Satan. Our reasoning powers are limited, for we are finite; our minds are darkened, for by nature we were away from God.

Pray for the divine light to shine in, and you will prove that even as the darkness flees before the light of the rising sun, so your difficulties will vanish in the presence of Jesus.

There is a solution to every problem in the word of God. Ask God by His Spirit to enable you to find that which will confirm your soul in a living faith in Him, and you will be both happy and free.

F. S. Marsh.
1924

EXTRACTS FROM A DIARY, 1929

September 26th.

We read Joel this morning, and considered how here the Lord gave a prophetic word to those who were responsible — the elders of Israel. The prospect of the coming of the day of the Lord was to arouse all to action, for now the Lord was about to decide in the valley of Jehoshaphat for the good and deliverance of His people.

His first address is to the old men, and then all the inhabitants. They were to consider the present state of things when all was devastated by various visitations. Like a virgin robbed of her husband of youth they are to bewail. The husbandmen were to be ashamed, for they were responsible for the harvest, and the priests too, for the offerings were not being presented. This is the order: the old men have declined — they are marked by drunkenness; the husbandmen have failed to produce harvest; and the priests have nothing for God. God is robbed! If the old men had kept fresh there would have been a yield. But now they are all called to the house of God to face the situation and proclaim a fast.

Chapter 2. The enemy comes, and the day of the Lord with all its attendant judgments is looming, but the prophet speaks of God's mercy and says, "Who knoweth?" And so all, even to the infants, are summoned from their most intimate joys to come and fast in solemn assembly, while the priests are exhorted to weep between the porch and the altar, (speaking of Christ's death); and what a full promise of the opening of God's hand is given in the presence of such repentance. The ready rain will be given richly and at the beginning of the season the latter rain will be granted. The blessing will result in the praise of the name of Jehovah and the Spirit's outpouring until all are in the fullest communications of the divine mind.

Chapter 3 shews the enemy, trapped and forced to an issue in the valley of decision, and the prophecy closes up with the house of the Lord yielding its waters of blessing, a centre of blessing for all, while desolation rests on Egypt and Edom.

R. Dunn

MOVEMENTS OF DIVINE PERSONS

Genesis 1:1-2

Exodus 3:8

19:18

John 1:14

Ephesians 4:9-10

I want to speak about the movements of divine Persons.

The movements of God in creation

I desire to draw your attention to this first great movement of God, when He came from what I may call the isolation of Deity into creatorial activity. It says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". It was at a word! As the disorder and chaos came in, we read that the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters, and this extraordinary scene which we see around us was brought into being. God spake and it was done; so that even the material side of it is indeed wondrous. In it we see God's eternal power and divinity but it was all made and framed for a purpose and we, by faith, apprehend that the worlds were framed by the word of God; not merely were they brought into being, but they were framed, put together in a certain definite way according to divine purpose. The whole scene was one which was not to be merely material in its import, but one in which the glory of God could be seen, and where the great question of good and evil could be wrought out.

All the material side of things that we see around us, wonderful as it is (although sin has come in and spoiled the earth), is but a platform on which God has been pleased to work. I cannot sufficiently impress you with the importance of the moral bearing of what God has done in coming out in creation. He moved out to create and, having settled the question of good and evil, to bring about a scene which will be for His eternal glory.

God's movements when sin came in

Now He has come out in these great movements and I want to show you how, when sin came in, God continued to move. He moved in a wonderful way when Adam sinned. We read, "They heard the voice of Jehovah Elohim, walking in the garden" (Genesis 3:8). It was a movement toward man, a movement of inquiry. Why should the blessed God walk in the garden? Why should He move in that direction? Because of His intense interest in man. His Son was to become Man and it was for the glory of His Son as well as for His own. Now God did not retreat into His ineffable glory when man sinned; He still continued to take interest in man. In the book of Genesis we find He shows great care in

investigating; for example at the time of the building of the tower of Babel, it says, “Jehovah came down to see” (Genesis 11:5). It was a divine movement. And then again, in regard of Sodom, He said, “I will go down ... and see” (Genesis 18:21). Not that He could not know from heaven of course. He could, but it was for our sake, to demonstrate His infinite patience and care. God’s visits were for that purpose, put in that way in these two incidents.

God’s movements in compassion

Then again He came down and visited His friend Abraham. He appeared to him at Mamre; it was a visit of God, not only to investigate the guilt of Sodom, but to convey to Abraham what He was about to do. How wonderful that God should visit man to acquaint him with His mind. That is what God did and He continues to do it.

Then in the passage in Exodus 3, where we read, He says, “I am come down to deliver them”. Could He not see the whole state from heaven? He could but He expressed His sympathy and came down to deliver. It was God’s interest in man. I say that because the modern idea is that God is so distant and that He takes little interest in man. The truth is that God, in mercy as well as in judgment, intervenes in man’s affairs and here He had come down to deliver them.

The appearing of God to Moses in the burning bush was a powerful testimony to God’s feelings toward men. He said to Moses, “I have seen assuredly the affliction of my people ... I know their sorrows ... I am come down to deliver them ... and to bring them up out of that land”.

God’s dwelling with Israel

Now these movements I speak of were but visits. After the formation of the tabernacle God moved to fill it with His glory. So too, in the construction of the temple, God moved in a similar manner and filled the temple with His glory. In Exodus 40, Moses could not go in because of the glory and in 1 Kings 8:11 the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of Jehovah. He came to dwell with men; it was a divine movement of a permanent character, as we might say; He came to dwell amongst His people.

What a wonderful thing that God should have a dwelling-place with men, bearing with their hard-heartedness. In Ezekiel we read how the glory lingered over Jerusalem, slowly departing till it disappeared in the east, and the temple was left without the glory of God. It will return in full measure in the day to come, as Ezekiel tells us later on in his book. That was the wonderful consummation that God had before Him. He would say, ‘I am not only going to visit you, but to dwell with you’.

The Word become flesh

The next great movement of God of which I want to speak is the incarnation. A divine Person came into manhood! “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” That is a movement of supreme importance. How deeply we should meditate on the truth of the incarnation. Not that we can ever compass it; we cannot understand the mystery of it, nevertheless we can and do understand that God has been revealed here in a Man, who dwelt and lived and moved about here. Every movement of that blessed Person down here is to fill us with the deepest interest and calls for our worship. There is not a word He spoke, nor an action or work He did, that is not worthy of our closest attention.

The gospels are so full. I think as we grow older, we study the gospels more closely in a worshipping spirit. Every step of the Lord as seen in them, every incident in which He meets sinners and speaks to His own, every step of His path demands our serious attention. The divine movements down here were wonderful, as He moved from the manger to the cross; every movement calls for devout study.

Christ’s stoop to death

How can I speak of the next movement — the descent! That wonderful descent is a movement in His manhood. He descended to the cross, for all was to be founded there. We worship as we follow that divine movement! We cannot follow beyond a certain point. We can follow the details of His trial and the steps of that last journey to the cross. We see His attitude towards the various ones congregated there and can listen to the gracious words He spoke, but when the pall of darkness fell, we can follow no further; we could not penetrate the depth of that descent, when that divine Person went into darkness, and wrath, and judgment for us. It serves to subdue our spirits. There is nothing, I believe, more powerful in subduing our spirits and bringing us into accord with His death than the contemplation of His sufferings and death. As we see what He went through, as far as we may, it has the deepest effect upon our hearts, and we are attracted to that blessed One and attached to Him for ever.

The exaltation of Christ as an answer to His humiliation

Now there was a moral answer to that descent and it is put in many ways in the Scripture. In Philippians 2:9 it says, “Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted him a name, that which is above every name”. In Colossians 3:1, He is said to be “sitting at the right hand of God”, an expression which demands our attention. Then in Hebrews 1:3 He has “set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high” — a similar expression. These expressions indicate an exalted place, a place of favour and power. I take it that to be seated on the right

hand of God means that it is the first place, the place of power and favour. He is said in Ephesians 1:20 to be set down at God's right hand in the heavenlies.

There are also several other expressions in the Scriptures indicating an even higher position than that. In Hebrews 4:14 it says that He "has passed through the heavens," in connection with His priesthood, and "become higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7: 26); and in Ephesians, has "ascended up above all the heavens" (Ephesians 4:10). His place of exaltation is even above what I have already mentioned; it is beyond the flight of our knowledge, "above all the heavens", for the heavens themselves, though they are described as the abode of God, are created but He has gone far above them all. He has passed through the heavens; He has gone far above all heavens. Think of the exaltation of this wonderful Person who came so low for us! He has gone into a glory beyond our comprehension, beyond all created things.

Christ's movements in glory

Now I want to go from that to ask this important question, 'What is His relation to us there?' We have seen how He came from infinite glory down to this scene of woe and how wonderful His descent was — is He going to leave us as having Himself ascended so high? No! There is a divine movement from heaven; it is described in several ways, but He is not going to leave the objects of His love here unvisited. I do not refer to the rapture but to His present movements towards and amongst His own.

You might think that having gone up far beyond our comprehension, He remains there, and that we adore Him there, and that is all we can do. Not at all! He will not leave us orphans; He says, "I am coming to you" (John 14:18). 'Coming' involves movement towards us. It is a movement of this wonderful Person to us. Of course it is spiritual, for literally He is in heaven. But there is a spiritual movement in which He comes to us! I desire to know more of this. He says, "I am coming to you" and we long to welcome Him when He does move in our direction. To be orphans means that you miss your parents who have gone; it is thus we miss Christ and He would comfort us. Does He comfort us by sending great gifts? Does He comfort us by sending the Spirit? He does but He also comforts us by coming Himself. "I am coming to you".

These are wonderful divine visitations. No one can explain it. Oh, that we might pay attention to such comings, that we might recognise Him when He comes! Think of that blessed One deigning to come to us, that we may be comforted. Some in a company may recognise Him, and some might not. Alas, that we might miss Him, be unable to recognise Him! It is heaven on earth when He comes, for it is Himself, and He brings all the atmosphere of heaven with Him,

revealing Himself in all the affections of His heart. So divine movements have not ceased.

There is also a divine movement in the way of life: I refer to the very remarkable passages in the writings of both Paul and John. Paul says, “No longer live, I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2: 20), and again in another connection: “If Christ be in you, the body is dead on account of sin, but the Spirit life on account of righteousness” (Romans 8:10). And even to the Corinthians, badly as they were going on, he says, “Do ye not recognise yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you” (2 Corinthians 13: 5)?

You may say, ‘How is that divine movement brought about?’ Well, without attempting to analyse it I would say that it is because the Spirit is here, and if one divine Person can be here, so to speak, Another can in the power of the Spirit. It is because God is here, inasmuch as the Spirit is here, that it is possible that Christ should be our life, and Christ should live in us. What a wonderful thing it is! What a wonderful movement it is of that divine Person when He becomes our life, when He lives in us. Christ is in us in that sense. I see that it can be so, because of His Spirit that dwells in us. If His love is such, that He could go into the depths for us, and ascend on high to be for us there, is it more wonderful that He should be our life, that He should take up His place in our hearts, and live in us? It is not only that we love Him; the effect of His living in us is that love is accentuated. If He is thus in us, then He is in us in love, and the result of His being in us is that our affections are warmed and stirred and we love Him because He has loved us.

God’s purpose is that all things are to be for His glory, and Christ is to be supreme in our hearts. It is a remarkable divine movement which brings to pass such wonderful realities in our hearts. John refers to His being “in us” more than once. That is in connection with affection, but I believe it to be more than that, it is because of the Spirit being here. John says, “He that abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4: 16), and, “Hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, that he has given to us of his Spirit” (1 John 4: 13).

The movement of the Holy Spirit

Before I go on to the final movement of the Lord Jesus, I want to refer to the movement of the blessed Spirit of God. That He moved in creation, we all know. He moved, too, in men of God. We know how the Spirit came on the judges such as Samson and how the Spirit of God enabled them to do exploits. They were visits; He did not come to dwell. He would come down and enable them to do things or, as with David, to compose the most wonderful psalms and to have the most wonderful spiritual experiences, but He was not a permanent

resident, wonderful as His movements were in relation to Israel, as they will be again when the Spirit will be poured out upon them. What I want to direct your attention to is the divine movement at Pentecost.

The materials have been carefully selected and provided by the Lord Himself. Though the disciples did not understand all His teaching in those three and a half years, when His influence in words and works was being daily impressed upon them, nevertheless they were greatly affected by them. Then in the forty days, we know how He instructed them. The Lord's teaching was most wonderful and when all this material had been carefully selected and that which was evil — Judas — had been cast aside, then there was a company fit to receive the Holy Spirit.

Upon the Lord Jesus, as we know, the Spirit came bodily, not as a Visitor. Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and He was full of the Spirit. He came upon Him; it was one divine Person identifying Himself with another divine Person here in manhood. There was no leaving Him; the Spirit came down and abode upon Him; it was a permanent residence. So the Spirit came down at Pentecost. The whole material was welded together and it was like the glory coming down into the tabernacle, or into the temple. It was the glory of God coming down and filling the house. The Spirit is spoken of in that way. Peter speaks of "the Spirit of glory" (1 Peter 4: 14), so that evidently the thought of glory is connected with the Spirit and not only the whole company but each individual composing it, each believer, is thus filled. Paul says, "Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?" (1 Corinthians 6: 19). It is not a visitation, but a divine movement that has resulted in the Holy Spirit becoming a permanent resident in our hearts.

How it solemnises the whole of our lives. How could such bodies be given over to sin? Or be controlled by our own wills? What an amazing effect it should have upon us, what a subduing effect! It is the most wonderful thing that has happened to us. Oh, that we could remember this, moment by moment, in our lives; in our daily walk, and in all matters of wisdom, and all matters requiring adjustment, that we might remember that there is this wonderful Person who will lead us into all truth, and will teach us. I cannot think of anything more calculated to have a spiritual and subduing effect upon us than this movement of the Holy Spirit.

The coming of the Lord and the scene into which He will bring us

I pass on now to the next great movement of the Lord Jesus. It is distinct from His continual movements. It is that He is coming for us. What a movement that will be when He descends from heaven for us! How can we picture the joy of that moment when we shall meet our blessed Lord in the air, and so be for ever

with the Lord? The heights to which He can take us, who can tell? It is said, we are seated in Him in the heavenlies; not merely that because He is there, we are to be there in the future, but we are now seated together in Him in the heavenlies. It is now; it is a restful position and gives us now the joys of the present heavenly position. Not only does He visit us but we are in Him there and we are there because He is there, as far as cause is concerned; but we have access by the Spirit to that heavenly scene where He is. In fact, not only does He move towards us and visit us but He dwells in us too, and in the Spirit moves us to that scene where He is, and that is no imagination, but a spiritual experience.

A great many things are said to be “in Christ” and they are real, and one desires greatly to be more in the enjoyment of our heavenly position. It is in the power of the Spirit, but it is the love of Christ that would give us now a present entrance into what is in heaven. Paul says, “The Lord himself, with an assembling shout ... shall descend from heaven” (1 Thessalonians 4: 16). That is the next great movement; we are waiting for that. What a wonderful thing it would be if it were to take place now! We know not when He will descend.

The Father and the Son making their abode with us

Now there is one other movement to which I would refer briefly, and it is found in John 14: 23. It not only gives us the manifestation to the individual who keeps His words, but it gives us the great fact that if we keep His word “my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.” Notice the plural, “We will come to him”. The secret of it lies in the Spirit; because the Spirit is in us, these things are possible; not only in the power of the Spirit, but because there is a divine Person in us, therefore the Father and the Son can make their abode with us. You must remember these things are spiritual and must be taken up in a spiritual way. You cannot speak about divine Persons as you can about human beings, and when it says, “We will come”, it means a divine movement, and the Father and the Son make their abode with the one who keeps His word — “my word” implying the whole testimony. It shows how we are bound up in the affections of divine Persons, and that divine Persons love us so much that They desire to give us Their company and that we should be with Them, as They with us.

When all movement is over

I pass on to the time when the visits and movements of which I have spoken are over, when God will be “all in all”, when the Son shall have given over the kingdom, and shall Himself be placed in subjection; then there is perfection of rest. Whatever spiritual movements there may be in the eternal state, we cannot say, but it is not a time of change or movement in the sense in which we have

been speaking, but it is God “all in all”. He has come now to a final conclusion, the Son actually taking this place of subjection for ever. You may have thought He came and took the place of subjection for a few brief years until the eternal state. Not at all! He has taken this place of subjection for all eternity. The One who has been here to make His love known to us, the objects of the Father’s counsel, never ceases to be towards us; but the Son shall be subject to Him who puts all things under Him, that God may be all in all. The wonderful fact remains that He takes up that position and is identified with His own for all eternity. Blessed, wonderful Person!

Conclusion

Thus the whole history unfolds before us and we see God coming out from His isolation, if I may use the expression, into His creatorial activities; and down the long stream of time moving in regard to man for His own glory; and when God is all in all, will it not be that supreme worship will be given to Him? Supreme appreciation of God will be there; we shall appreciate God fully, as far as He can be known as revealed. He will have His glory in that scene of wonderful glory and worship, and at the same time our hearts, without any let or hindrance, without any sense of distance, will enjoy the company of that blessed Person, who has made the love of God known to our hearts in time. How it fills one’s heart with joy and thankfulness, that God should have come so near to us and that Christ should have descended where He did, and ascended where He did, that He should be for us now and for ever!

What a dignity it puts upon us! I say to you, ‘Where is the world in the face of all this? What place does it hold in such a scheme?’ Can anything equal the prospect before us? There is nothing that the world can offer to a soul established in the love of God! As these things are being gradually worked out in our experience, God is so dealing with us as to make things more and more real and precious to our hearts. One prays that the Lord may use this occasion to make the Lord more precious to us, and that we may pay attention to all these divine movements and divine visitations, and have sufficient spiritual discernment to recognise them when they occur, until that bright and blessed moment arrives when He will take us to be with Himself for ever!

Dr. C. C. Elliott

An address at Croydon, May 1937

THINGS WE OUGHT TO DO

Feet Washing

“If I therefore, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14)

We need to keep near to Christ but we also need to keep near to one another. “Ye also ought to wash one another’s feet”. Why is this necessary? It is because we are all going through a defiling world and we pick things up. Picture the scene here in John 13. The Lord is there with His own. He is the greatest Person by far that was present but He leaves the table during supper and He takes a basin. We might say that it was a job for some of the lesser ones. Think of His service; “... and having taken a linen towel he girded himself: then he pours water into the washhand basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples” (John 13:4-5). Then He tells us, “Ye also ought to wash one another’s feet; for I have given you an example that, as I have done to you, ye should do also” (John 13:14-15). He wants these conditions to continue; it is necessary that these conditions continue. He is just about to be delivered up and to die and He takes such a time to serve His own in this way, washing the disciples’ feet. What a service of love! Now He wants those conditions to continue; we are all going through a scene of defilement; we pick up spots and things that defile us and He tells us that if we are going to have part with Him we need to have our feet washed. “Unless I wash thee, thou hast not part with me” (John 13:8).

If we see a spot on a brother or a sister, can we not take them and wash their feet? It will mean that we have to get down; we need to leave our dignity if we are going to get down to wash that brother or that sister’s feet. Elsewhere we read about “purifying by the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26); that is what we are trying to do tonight and in these constant occasions of coming together when we read the scriptures it is the washing of water by the word. What a service is open to us, “Ye also ought to wash one another’s feet”. Let us be engaged with it more, more engaged with Christ, but also engaged in service toward one another.

Jim Strachan.

Extract from an address at Gardenstown, 31st December 1992

The Lord took Mr Strachan to Himself in June 2002

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