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Living Water

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THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS - CHAPTER 11

(Highlights of a Bible reading)

Chapters 9, 10 and 11 of Romans relate to God's dealings with Israel. The apostle is writing to Gentiles so that they may be enlightened about the place of Israel in the ways of God.

In that God has turned to the Gentiles in the present time, the question naturally arises, 'What has happened to the promises made to the Jew?' This is a question which Paul sets out to answer. First, however, he draws on the history of Elijah and shows that, just as there was in his day a remnant of seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, so "in the present time also" there were Jews who had been brought into the church, not on the ground of their works but "according to the election of grace". Paul himself was evidence of this acting of divine grace and so is every Jew who believes.

Turning to the question of the promises that were made by God to the Jews, if we look at how things are now we see that not one bit of what was promised to Israel exists in them nationally, yet all will be restored; the time will come when they are grafted in again. Towards the end of the chapter, the apostle reminds us that, "the gifts and the calling of God are not subject to repentance". All that is promised to Israel will therefore be maintained. The great evidence of this will be in the world to come when Jerusalem will be given a place as head of the nations. God has not forgotten her and His eye is on her still. The way God brings things about is perfectly consistent with His thoughts. In the meantime in His ways of grace we read that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" and blessing is available to all. The understanding of these things calls out the ascription of praise at the end of the chapter, "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable his judgments, and untraceable his ways!"

The mind of the Spirit of God is plain in the Old Testament. In taking up Abraham, God was never going to be limited to Israel. We read: "Through thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed". God always had all men in mind - both Jew and Gentile - and that is what He has brought to pass in the church.

In verse 11 we read: "by their fall there is salvation to the nations to provoke them to jealousy". Then in verse 14: "if by any means I shall provoke to jealousy them which are my flesh, and shall save some from among them". The apostle preached faithfully to Jews, and Gentiles, but with particular affection for his brethren, and with the desire that the very blessing which they could see

the Gentiles entering into would stir them up to embrace that blessing which the despised Gentiles were enjoying. Paul's great desire was that the Jew should be turned from the dead way they were on and be restored "as life from among the dead". The present time of blessing of the Gentiles is a wonderful appeal on God's part to unbelieving Israel. Through it God is saying, 'The Gentiles enjoy My favour, why are you not doing so? You have the first claim on the promises'.

Verse 12 speaks of the "fulness" that is Israel's. We see something of it in chapter 9, where it says that theirs is "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the law-giving, and the service, and the promises; whose are the fathers..." (vs. 4-5). Their fulness, very great indeed.

Israel's position as a nation before God is very serious. They have been set aside for the time being. Paul speaks of the goodness and the severity of God here. We see the severity of God in the breaking out of Israel. We are to take account of this soberly and not be high minded but fear. Individual Jews had come into blessing through the gospel, but as far as the nation itself was concerned, "blindness in part has happened to Israel". It is not that God sets Himself against a particular Jew but, where people close their eyes from their side, God allows a blindness to come upon them.

Paul has the same thought in mind in 2 Corinthians 3 where we read: "But their thoughts have been darkened, for unto this day...the veil lies upon their heart". That is the whole problem, that the veil is not on their mind but on their heart. It is a general truth in the things of God that if we leave God out we may well become blind to Him and it is only the mercy of God that ever brings us back. That can in measure be true as regards a believer. If truth is despised and ignored God may cause us to lose that truth for the time being. We can all profit from the warning here.

Israel has been cut out through unbelief and disobedience and the Gentile branches have been grafted in. The apostle continues with a serious warning for us who are of the nations: "Be not high minded, but fear; if God indeed has not spared the natural branches; lest it might be he spare not thee either". There is a line of things in our day which calls itself christian but which disregards Christ and despises His teachings. Its true character is every bit as apostate as the attitude of the Jews who, claiming to be God's people, crucified His Son. The time will come when the Gentile, too, will be cut out through unbelief and Israel restored to their place. As we know from other scriptures, after the true church is caught up at the rapture, the nations and an apostate 'church' will form a evil alliance against God Himself. The nations will therefore be cut out and way made for

the restoration of Israel. The teaching in verses 16 - 27 is not in relation to individuals (who are saved by faith) but deals with the place of Israel as a nation in relation to the Gentiles. The blindness imposed on Israel is until the fulness of the nations be come in. Once Israel as a nation turn to the Lord, then “all Israel shall be saved” (v.26).

When the time comes for Israel to be restored nationally it will be as “life from among the dead”, for their blessing will be totally the work of God and will involve a complete change. There will also be very great blessing among the nations in general when Israel turns to the Lord. The restoration of Israel is the fulfilling of a great part of Old Testament prophecy. Messiah’s throne will be set up and Israel will stand at the head of the nations in the world to come. They will display to the nations the glory of Christ’s administration.

All this ought to make us value the wonderful spiritual wealth in Christ which is for us now. Israel has fallen away, have stumbled and fallen, and it has been allowed of God, but out of it all comes tremendous spiritual blessing for us in our day. Then these passages are to teach us something of God’s judgment and government because the way that He took with Israel has some very powerful moral lessons for us.

As Paul contemplates the greatness of divine mercy and the wisdom of the ways of God, he is led to praise. He exclaims, “O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable his judgments, and untraceable his ways!... For of him, and through him, and for him are all things: to him be glory for ever. Amen” (Romans 11:33-36).

A deepening sense of divine mercy is to open our eyes to see the depth of divine wisdom, for mercy makes everything of God and nothing of me. I cannot presume to know better than God, or to correct Him. We find in Scripture some who thought at different times that they knew best and they all had to learn that they did not: “Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?”

Mercy has pervaded all that God has done. If we go over the history of Jew and Gentile we see that mercy was shown to man at every stage. Despite failure, in God’s mercy men are brought through. He is merciful and He has brought man into His presence through Christ. We will have a very great sense of mercy at the judgment seat of Christ. We have a very imperfect view of it down here but there we will see how great it is and it will prompt our praise in the same way as Paul here is overwhelmed by the glory of divine mercy and breaks into this doxology.

We will always know the One who saved us and God will never let what Christ did at the cross be forgotten. The Holy Spirit will maintain it with the heavenly hosts and cause praise to spring up because of it.

Based on Bible readings in Bromley, January & February 2002

THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AT A MARRIAGE

John 2:1-11

1 Peter 3:7

The verses read in the gospel of John will be very familiar to a good many here. They have often been spoken of at times like this: the marriage of a christian man and a christian woman. But I would like to speak about them again, because it is a most remarkable thing that in this gospel the first sign that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, ever did was to come to this marriage at Cana and make it a specially happy time.

It is a good thing that Jesus and His disciples were invited to that marriage. It would have been a very different sort of occasion if they had not been there. And it is a very good thing, H and G, that you desire the Lord Jesus Christ to be with you in your marriage. That is the desire of all your christian friends that love you: that you would begin with the Lord and go on with the Lord.

Perhaps it was a rather unusual marriage, certainly by our standards, in that the wine so quickly ran out. "They have no wine" (v.3). Disappointment very quickly set in. Disappointment does not usually set in on the first day of anyone's marriage but it can. This chapter has the remedy for every disappointment that ever came along in a marriage, so we need to go through these verses briefly and see what they have to say to us.

Mary, the mother of the Lord, put the matter to Him, "They have no wine". We do not know what she thought He might do but from the way that the passage goes on, we know what Jesus did. It says, "there were standing there six stone water-vessels, according to the purification of the Jews". Now, I am not an expert in Jewish ritual and we do not need to be but I would just say this to you, that however much washing you ever do with water it never purifies your soul.

It may cleanse your body but it will never cleanse your soul. The way that the reference to being purified comes in so soon here, I think, raises the question for us all, where do we find purity and where do we find purification?

There is a lovely verse in the epistle to the Hebrews that speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ. It says He “made by himself the purification of sins” (Hebrews 1:3). And I take the opportunity to say now, that every christian is a forgiven sinner. Every one needs their sins forgiven. The Bible says, and I have never had cause to doubt the truth of it, that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

You think of the glory and majesty of God and say to yourself, Do I come up to that? I have to say, I do not. No honest person would ever say they measured up to the glory of God Himself. “All have sinned”. We all know our own history. The great news of the christian gospel, the gospel of God concerning His Son our Lord Jesus Christ, is that there is free and full forgiveness for everyone and that you can be really purified in your soul. Not just your body but your soul, which is what really matters.

The Lord Jesus says, “Fill the water-vessels with water”. Do not leave anything out, fill them right up. Yes, it was still water. But then He said, Draw it out now, and carry it to the one who is in charge of the feast. So they took it and he tasted it and found that it had become wine. Why do you think the Lord Jesus would stop at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, a small town most of us would be hard put to find on the map? He turned in there by invitation to a wedding and He made it a happy time. It is not a question, you know, of getting drunk with wine or anything like that. The Bible is very clear about that. But as we go into marriage we need to be sure that the joy is not going to run out. Sadly, I say soberly, on a day like this there will be a good many marriages and we have to say, as we look around, that for some of them the joy will run out.

H and G, we do not want your joy to run out and it does not need to. You have got each other. Well, thank God for that. You have each other, you might say, for keeps! For all the time that we are left here in this world until the Lord should come. But it is a great thing to have the Lord Jesus with you in your marriage. Make a point of wanting Him in your marriage and bringing Him into it all the time. Do not leave Him out. When there are troubles and problems do not seek first your own solution; come to the Lord for His solution. He will be generous to you and provide solutions.

Forgive me speaking about problems. I have no special reason to think you will have problems except that I am married and so are many of your friends here

today. We know that in life things can happen that test us in our commitment to the Lord Jesus and make us wonder how things are going to be. The remedy for it all is in turning to the Lord Jesus Christ, to bring Him in.

The feast-master was greatly surprised. He says that generally people provide the best wine first and then afterwards something that is not so good but, “thou hast kept the good wine till now”. What was provided by the Son of God was bound to be the best they could ever have. The joy that being a christian and belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, the joy that that brings into your marriage and what you then have to share, is greater than anything else could ever be.

It says, “This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory”. It was glory - no one else could have done what He did. There are six more signs in this gospel. I wonder how many of us know what all the seven signs were. This one and six more to follow, extending through healing and giving sight to the blind and raising the dead. The Lord Jesus was able for it all. But this, in grace, is how He began. Then, we read, “His disciples believed on him”. However far they had got in their souls so far, now they were fully committed to Him.

I read one verse in the first epistle of Peter because it connects with what we are saying. All of the first few verses of this chapter are very good for us husbands and wives, as to how we enjoy marriage. Peter writes as a husband; we know he was married because he had a wife and a mother-in-law. Here he writes as a father, an elder actually, with a lot of sympathy. He has some counsel for wives; I did not read it all but there is a reference to the hidden man of the heart. Having the Lord Jesus in your heart is a great thing for the christian wife. It does not, in any way, come between you and your husband, but would rather make for blessing that you have given the first place in your heart, in your life, to the Lord Jesus. It is absolutely safe, to give Him the first place. And H can do the same. It is not just a word for wives; it is a word for husbands as well, to give a place to the Lord Jesus, the first place in your heart.

Now, a little counsel for husbands, how to be good husbands. H, I am sure you want to be a good husband, just as G wants to be a good wife. Make sure that you are. Make sure that you are what God would say is a good husband and what God would say is a good wife. This can be a bit different from what other people might say. Make sure that you are a good husband and a good wife in God’s sight. You see, you are heirs together of the grace of life. My parents had this as a text in their house and I remember it from my childhood. I commend it

to you, heirs together, what you have got to share by way of the enjoyment of the life of two believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, “that your prayers be not hindered”.

Remember to pray together; take all your burdens to the Lord - and your thanksgivings as well. We do not want prayers to be only about the difficulties and trials of life and what to do next: there are thanksgivings for the good things of life - may they be many for you and for every christian company and every christian household represented here, for blessing. It says, “The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (Proverbs 10:22).

That is all I wanted to say to you. The prayers that follow will be more effective in bringing you before the throne of grace than anything I could say, but remember the Lord graced a marriage and it was a great blessing for those present that He did so. We are not told their names, we are not told that they said anything but simply they were there and the Lord also was there. That, I am sure, is your desire now; to have the Lord with you now and for the rest of your time together. May the Lord bless us all for His name’s sake. Amen.

David Burr

Word at a marriage, Maidstone, July 2002.

FOOTSTEPS

The subject is ‘Footsteps’: the footsteps of God, the footsteps of Jesus, the footsteps of the flock, and the footsteps of a brother.

The footsteps of God

“Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths are in the great waters; and thy footsteps are not known” (Psalm 77:19).

God's ways are past finding out. We read that His "way is in the sea"; His pathway is in great waters and His footsteps are not known. How God moves, where He is moving and when are not revealed to us.

This scripture literally alludes to what God did when He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. He made a way for them through the Red sea. His people were brought through the sea on dry land with a wall of water on each side. The Egyptians could not stop them. When God moves no one can stay His hand.

His path in great waters speaks of the unknown way in which God moves and works in the depths. In a certain way we only find where He has been after He has gone by. Some years ago in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp there were two christian Jews. They had been confined there for three years, suffering humiliation, brutality and starvation to such an extent that they had almost lost their faith in Christ. One morning one of them looked through the filthy windows of the block in which they were and there, growing in the wall, were two most beautiful flowers. He pointed them out to the other christian and said: 'God is here, that is where God has been to recover my faith in Christ'. God had moved, in his view, so that his faith in Christ should be recovered.

Looking back, we see where God's footsteps have been. Consider the movements of Jesus. How we may see the footsteps of God in the movements of Jesus, especially as He walked to Calvary carrying His cross. "...I am not alone, but I and the Father..." The Father was with Him in everything.

In the history of the testimony, John Wycliffe (1330-84), (who has been described as the morning star of the reformation) translated the Bible into English. William Tyndale followed making his own translation and printing it so that every ploughboy might be able to read it. Those were God's movements to put the Bible into the hand of everyone who wished to read it in English.

Martin Luther, (1483-1546), on 31st October 1517 nailed his famous ninety-five theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg. God was moving to bring home to many the great truth of justification by faith! What a wonderful blessing! God has justified us freely and for ever because we believe in Jesus.

Then we can take account, too, of what God did in the nineteenth century when atheism, communism, agnosticism and Darwinism were all raising their heads against God, yet the wonderful message - "Behold the Bridegroom", shone in its brightness against the darkness!

The footsteps of Jesus

“For to this have ye been called; for Christ also has suffered for you, leaving you a model that ye should follow in his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when reviled, reviled not again; when suffering, threatened not; but gave himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Peter had the wonderful privilege of having companied with the Lord for three and a half years. Here he outlines some of the steps of Jesus, showing what is precious to God in manhood. Peter observed the Lord during the time of His suffering and noted, He “did no sin”. Think of Jesus standing before the High Priest, then before Herod and Pilate. However much He was provoked, He “did no sin”. The moral excellence of Jesus shines in Peter’s soul. The sinless One had to be made sin that “we might become God’s righteousness in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

We read, “When reviled, reviled not again”. The perfection of Jesus is there for us to feed upon. When the servants of the High Priest said to Peter, ‘You are a Galilean’, he cursed and denied it. How easily reviling springs to our lips when someone offends us. How careful we need to be to follow in this footstep of Jesus who, “when reviled, reviled not again”.

There was no guile found in His mouth. He spoke the absolute truth. We, as christians, are called to speak the truth. It is possible to tell the truth to hide the truth. But Jesus did not do that. There was no guile with Him. Oh, the perfection of the Master!

We read on, “When suffering, threatened not”. He could have called twelve legions of angels. He could have swept the world with judgment and finished it for ever. What a contrast it was that when they crucified Him He said: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He at that very time interceded for sinners; He never threatened one. Peter says that these are the steps that you and I are to follow in.

Finally Peter writes that He “gave himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously”. What a pattern for us. The Saviour committed everything into the hands of Him who judges righteously. He awaits the day when God will deal with everything. In the epistle to the Romans we are told, “Vengeance belongs to me, I will recompense, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

In our lives let us learn to do that. We do not understand the things that happen in our lives, our families, or our business. We have sorrows that we do not

understand. The resource of the believer is to commit everything into the hands of Him who judges righteously. All His acts are righteousness. One has said, 'Events neither challenge His throne or change His heart, they only establish His purpose but to us He is love'. Peter had a sense of the love that was towards him, so he writes: "cast all your care upon him, for he cares about you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Peter knew from practical experience that Jesus cared for him. When Peter was in the palace of the High Priest and the cock crew for the third time, the Lord turned round and looked at Peter. Peter caught that look and was immediately affected. It is striking that in Luke's account of that incident it says that immediately those who were beating Jesus covered Him up. The devil could see the effect on Peter of the look of Jesus. It was a look that broke Peter's heart. That is why Peter says, 'Walk in these steps, brethren, cast your burden on Him.' "Having cast all your care upon him, for he cares about you". How wonderfully Peter knew that Jesus cared about him. In the midst of His physical sufferings Christ did not think of Himself; He thought of others and He thought of Peter and He looked at Peter to limit his failure and later to restore his soul. What a Saviour.

The footsteps of the flock.

"Tell me, thou whom my soul loveth,
Where thou feedest thy flock,
Where thou makest it to rest at noon;
For why should I be as one veiled
Beside the flocks of thy companions?

. . .
If thou know not, thou fairest among women,
Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock,
And feed thy kids beside the shepherds' booths"

(Song of Songs 1:7-8).

I think the setting of this scripture is that we have the black Shulammitte maiden - "I am black, but comely, daughters of Jerusalem" (v.5) asking Solomon where he feeds his flock. The answer is, "If thou know not, . . . Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock". She is to find guidance by the footsteps of the flock.

We find the flock in John's gospel chapter 10 where the Lord says, "When he has put forth all his own, he goes before them". You do not go on ahead, we are to follow the Shepherd. As the Psalmist puts it: "he leadeth me beside still

waters” (Psalm 23:2). That is what the Lord would do; He leads to the place where the soul is at peace. He leads to the enjoyment of the Father’s love.

Every one in the Lord’s flock is known by Him. We read in John 10: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them life eternal; and they shall never perish, and no one shall seize them out of my hand” (John 10:27, 28). There are five promises in that verse. We are safe in His hands.

If you wanted to find the flock you would have to see from their footsteps where they had gone. In one sense, of course we only find the flock by finding the Shepherd, but there is a sense, too, that there is to be directional guidance in the footsteps of the flock.

I want to consider the direction taken by some of those assemblies (or churches) addressed by the Lord at the beginning of Revelation. Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea represent conditions which run on till the Lord comes at the rapture.

Laodicea was a very wealthy city. Those there in the church were rich and, in their view, “had need of nothing”. They were lukewarm in their love and works for Christ. Their footsteps led to worldliness, self satisfaction, pride and self indulgence. The Lord was outside of this company.

Despite this however, Jesus personally could still be located. His love for them remained and His voice could be heard if they listened. His promise to sup with any that would open the door to Him was wonderful. He would stay with them until midnight (“I will sup with him”) and then take them to glory (“and he with Me”).

The footsteps of Philadelphia were commended by the Lord. He knew their works, they kept His word, they did not deny His name and they waited for Him (they kept the word of His patience). The Lord promises to give them peace at the hottest time (I “will keep thee out of the hour of trial”). Their footsteps led to Christ as the One who builds and adorns the temple of God.

The woman in the Song of Songs is told to go by the footsteps of the flock and there at noon-tide, in the heat, she would find the Lord. Let us remember that, He is to be found, however severe the pressure. You can find the Saviour, you can find the Shepherd by following the footsteps of the flock.

How are we walking in this day at the close of the testimony? Let us consider our ways and works in our companies and take footsteps that lead to the presence and company of the Lord.

The footsteps of a brother

“The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he has often refreshed me, and has not been ashamed of my chain; but being in Rome sought me out very diligently, and found me - the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord in that day - and how much service he rendered in Ephesus thou knowest best.” 2 Timothy 1:16-18

The footsteps of a brother, or a sister, are illustrated in Onesiphorus. Paul was imprisoned and, according to tradition, was held in a dungeon reached by three hundred and seventy four steps from street level. Someone who visited it said that it is wet, dark, dank and miserable. Onesiphorus was a brother who recognised Paul’s plight and pressure and sought him out diligently. Perhaps Paul was depressed. I am sure that Paul knew what depression was. Amazingly, it even says of the Lord that He, “began to be sorrowful and deeply depressed” (Matthew 26:37). I think Paul must have been like that for he was overjoyed that this man found him.

Onesiphorus diligently sought Paul out. (Onesiphorus’s name means ‘profit-bringing’. I would like to be a brother like that, so that whatever the service undertaken, the result of it is profit for the people of God.) He was possibly risking his life even in doing that, since Paul was a prisoner because he preached Jesus, One who is coming to fill the universe with His glory long after Caesar has become dust and ashes. Onesiphorus searched until he found Paul. How many brothers have you sought until you found them? It is a mark of the shepherd.

How Paul appreciated one brother who would take the trouble to travel to Rome, to search him out, to risk the impending persecution that he might draw on himself. Perhaps Onesiphorus was arrested, since Paul goes on, “the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord in that day”.

Paul continues, “how much service he rendered in Ephesus....” Here was a man who was equal to service in Ephesus and I think that suggests that he was a man who was marked by first love. He could serve in Ephesus: a man who loved Christ and therefore loved his brother. Let us learn to love one another. You see a brother depressed in spirit, or sick, or in trouble - let us express the compassions of God in the way that Onesiphorus did.

Conclusion

The footprints of a christian show movement from earth to heaven. The objective is not only a walk here for the glory of the Lord in testimony and in love to every believer in Christ but to reach Christ where He is. That is the end of the road, the fulfilment of every footstep - Christ in heaven.

We sometimes sing:

‘The path which our Saviour has trod
Has led up to His Father and God’.

That is where His footsteps have gone. He came from God, He passed through the wilderness of time and has gone up to His Father and God. That is the end of the road.

‘With Thee shall our rest be on high,
When in holiness bright we sit down,
With the joy of Thy love ever nigh,
And a peace that Thy presence shall crown.’

Let us follow in His footsteps. Follow the Master, become like Him, be here for Him until He comes.

May it be so for His name’s sake.

Philip Robinson

Address at Peterhead, 27 April, 2002.

A MORNING SONG

Thou wakedst, Father, while in peace
 Thy weary children slept;
Thy love through all night's watches long
 Its charge all safely kept.

Shines on us bright as morning sun
 Thy mercy ever new;
Thy grace is sweet as morning air,
 Is fresh as morning dew.

In Thine own heaven a glorious Sun
 Which never sets we see;
Warmed by His beams our hearts arise
 In thankful praise to Thee.

But fear we: wakes the world of sin;
 Ne'er sleeps its prince, the foe;
Be with us, Holy Father, still,
 As through such world we go.

Uphold us in Thy sleepless care;
 And keep us, on our way,
As peaceful as the sleep of night,
 Amid the stress of day.

Alexander Carruthers

THE FEET OF JESUS

Oh wondrous, holy, beauteous feet,
The feet of Christ the Lord;
The feet of One who published peace,
Who spread God's love abroad.
His feet in tireless service moved
Across this desert waste.
In changeless love He went His way,
Despite man's threatening hate.

His blessed feet drew near to Nain,
He touched the young man's bier,
The One who had the keys of death
Could meet the sorrow there.
He knew the sinner's restless heart,
In Simon's house at meat,
Oh wondrous grace, her need was met
While weeping at His feet.

The man by Satan's power long bound,
Was found, freed, at His feet,
Sitting and clothed, in rightful mind,
A soul for service meet.
And Mary, too, that good part chose
In blessed listening sweet;
The leper, cleansed, fell to the ground
And thanked Him at those feet!

He heard the needy beggar's cry,
His wondrous feet stood still!
He open'd their eyes, Himself to see,
Their vision now to fill.
Zaccheus, too, the Saviour sought,
To Jericho He moved,
The longing heart to satisfy,
The soul to fill with good.

Until, at length, His blessed feet
To Calvary were led,
There, nailed upon a cross of wood
His precious blood was shed.
Yet, raised, living from the grave,
Gone from the empty tomb,
His feet led out to Bethany
And there, He blessed His own.

G.M.H. (1957)

‘OH! HOW SIMPLE IT IS!’

So said a lady to me, shortly before a gospel preaching was about to begin. I enquired what she meant. ‘Oh!’ said she, ‘I was thinking about how the Lord met with me - would you like to hear it?’

I at once assured her of my interest for I loved, and still love, such personal testimonies. Nothing so helps to win souls and make a wise soul-winner as learning how the Lord won others. He deals so differently with different cases. How differently He dealt with Nicodemus of John 3, from the way He dealt with the woman of Samaria of John 4; or the impotent man of John 5; or the guilty adulteress of John 8; or the blind beggar of John 9!

But to return to the lady who told me about her conversion. Said she: ‘I was burdened with my sins for months, and could get no relief, even from the elders and the pastor of the church I regularly attended, but one never-to-be-forgotten evening the burden rolled away. I was sitting in the garden. I had been turning over the pages of a hymn book, and had just laid it down with a frustrated desire to find peace with God, but, as I did so, my eyes caught sight of a text printed in bold type on the cover:-

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10).

‘At once, a flash of light from God illuminated the sacred words, and entered my soul, revealing the simple and elementary truth of the gospel, as I had never seen it before. Indeed a voice - was it the voice of the Spirit? - seemed to say to me, ‘Confess and believe and be saved’. I was filled with surprise and joy, and to think that I never saw it before.’

Later I showed the words to my husband but alas! it was all dark to him, though all light to me.’

Such was her simple story told with a joy that went to my heart; and when she closed it I thought of the poet’s lines:-

‘To some the saving gospel seems
So simple and so true,
That when they first see what it means,
They scarcely deem it new-
And yet to others the same truths
No light, no help may bring:
They are but puzzling phrases strung
Like beads upon a string.’

Salvation is a wide and far-reaching theme, and the lady who spoke about it only touched its fringe. But the touch of her faith brought out a ray of light that is never given to unbelief. “To the Law and the testimony,” says the voice of inspiration. “if they (false teachers) speak not according to this word, for them there is no daybreak” (Isaiah 8:20). But to faith there is daybreak. “The entrance (or opening) of Thy words giveth light”. It is the ‘opening’ of them that gives “understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130). The simple see what the mental wiseacres see not; and they cry, ‘Oh, how simple it is!’

Think and ponder on the simplicity of the gospel. It has depths so profound that no human line has ever fathomed them but it has shallows too, and every one of us must get into the shallows before we can dive into its depths. If you are anxious about your soul, believe and confess the Lord Jesus and what He has done when He cried, “It is finished” and then, further, believe what God has done when He raised Him from the dead, signifying His complete satisfaction with His work on the cross. Believe on God, who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification. (Romans 10:9-10; 4:24-25; 1 Peter 1:21).

Samuel Carter

EXTRACTS FROM A DIARY - 1929

September 29th.

We had the prophet OBADIAH for our spiritual breakfast this morning, and a wholesome word it is for us as to our relations together; for although the judgments are against all the nations, Edom comes in for a special attention; his treatment of his brother Israel is exposed and condemned and he is utterly judged.

If jealousy has marked our relations with our brother, even although, as Jacob did, he may have given cause for provocation, the Lord sees it and will bring about retribution after Jacob has learned his lessons. The end of Edom (the jealous one) shows the end of all who act in envy, and that is, that he is despised among the very peoples with whom he conspired against Israel. He was an ambitious man, Edom, dwelling in the clefts of the rocks, exalting himself as the eagle, setting his nest among the stars; and the envious man is so because he would occupy these heights for his own glory, but God brings him low. Thieves and robbers come at length to him and he is despoiled, searched, and all his hidden things sought out. How much better to be transparent with God and allow Him now to search us and find out all our hidden things.

But Jacob had been obliged to suffer all this indignity and anger because of his own unbrotherly conduct, and had come to judge himself for his provocation. If we find the evidences of jealousy on the part of any, it is well to inquire whether there has been something said in an unguarded moment which may have awakened these evil emotions, and God will show us. Before Jacob went up to God's house, he had to be thus inwardly examined, and again when in Numbers 20 a messenger is sent to Edom, "Thus saith thy brother", and refers appealingly to all the trouble that had befallen us- "let us pass," etc., Jacob has to recall his treatment of Esau and go round; and if the soul of the people is much discouraged because of the way, yet they must be made to feel that they had their share in it.

But, judging our past, it is not ours to act until God comes in and deals completely and finally with this opposition, when His judgments are abroad upon the earth and Jacob shall possess their inheritance. Then Jacob is as fire and has his part as victor in dealing with his foe. "And the kingdom shall be Jehovah's".

Robert Dunn

PIETY AND SPIRITUALITY

Hebrews	5:5 & 7-9
1 Timothy	4:14-end
	4:1-8
	6:3-6
1 Corinthians	2:7-end
	3:1-3

I seek the help of the Spirit of God to speak of piety and spirituality.

The passage in Hebrews presents the Person of our Lord Jesus, and I want to draw attention to the phrase “and having been heard because of his piety”. What is piety? I believe it is the fear of God, or honouring God, and involves bringing Him into our circumstances. It may also be translated ‘godliness’. It is something that is in short supply in the world today.

We are in an age which is increasingly materially minded and which leaves God out of all its calculations. You will notice that the scriptures read in Timothy are addressed to the individual. We are in a day when all that is outward and public has completely failed, whether in Israel, or the church, hence the call for individual committal. Although everything has failed outwardly, nothing of what God has wrought will ever fail. God did ever address Himself to the individual but in the present day He would particularly address each one of us, that we might be found going against the tide of this world which is going on to destruction. There is nothing too small in our lives for God and there is certainly nothing too great. We do need God in relation to every detail of our lives, not just our problems. Our daily lives should be worked out taking into account God’s will and God’s thoughts.

I begin with the consideration of our Lord Jesus. Every moment of His life was filled out in absolute perfection. It is a most affecting passage of scripture where we read in Hebrews, but the phrase I desire to fasten on is, “and having been heard because of his piety”. You may say, ‘Had He not every right to be heard because He was Son?’ We would have to answer, ‘Yes’, but He took a place in manhood, entering into all that manhood involves. He knew what it was to hunger, to thirst and to be weary, and many such things, sin apart, which each of us experiences here. He felt as no other, when He came into contact with sickness and death and demon. He was perfect, sinless, holy but He was a real Man.

I believe the reference here in Hebrews is to His agonising in the garden of Gethsemane. However, His piety is not limited to that. When He met Satan in the temptations at the outset of His public ministry, He did not meet Him by the exercise of divine power. The devil was overthrown because the Lord brought in the word of God. Three times He was tempted and three times the Lord Jesus brings in the word of God. That was piety; He never moved from perfect dependence on God.

Perhaps you may face a problem or are facing temptation. Maybe persons are persecuting or ridiculing you. How are you going to meet them? Bring God into it, bring in the word of God. That is piety. It may be testing, but it is simple and real. We need to get back to the realities of christian life and to allow Christ to control our lives. We need to be simple and dependent on God.

We are always in danger of being affected by the kind of world that is around us in its so-called sophistication. Strip away the veneer and what is left? Nothing but corruption, lawlessness and death. What a contrast in the Lord Jesus!

I give you another example of His piety. Before He appointed the twelve apostles He spent all night in prayer. I wonder what the wrestlings were as He went over their names; first Peter, then He goes down the list to Judas Iscariote. He knew from the outset who was going to deliver Him up, but in holy perfection, He spent the night in prayer. That is piety. He brought God into the matter; He did always the things which please the Father.

What about your life dear friend, dear brother or sister? I say 'friend' because there were those in scripture who were pious who were not at first christians. Thank God, He took account of their piety and they became christians. I am thinking of Cornelius. He was pious; his whole house was marked by piety. His alms and supplications had gone up to God. He was a praying man and he had a pious soldier in his household. God takes account of piety and that man and his household were blessed.

To return to the Lord Jesus, there came the moment in Gethsemane of His strong crying and tears. I think we little understand the agony of soul of our Lord in His holy sinless perfection, feeling what lay before Him at the cross. We are told that He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. Well, Gethsemane was an occasion of supreme suffering in His spirit. It has

often been said, He did not learn to obey; He always obeyed, but He learned what it cost to be obedient. Sometimes we may have to learn the cost of being obedient. The Lord Jesus learned it in holy perfection; the scripture says that He was heard because of His piety. He “offered up both supplications and entreaties to him who was able to save him out of death”. That is not, “save him from dying”. He knew that death had to be faced - He was saved out of death.

Blessed and wondrous Saviour; it was necessary that He should go into death. What a test for the sinless One to face the awful reality of death on our behalf. Yet it says He was heard because of His piety. Surely not only was He heard there, but on the cross when He said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). There was perfect, holy dependence in all the way. That was piety. The Lord Jesus brought God into everything that He did. “Though he were Son”, the condition into which He came was real manhood and He never moved out of its limitations and He was heard because of His piety.

There are other incidents which demonstrate the piety of the Lord Jesus. Consider His piety in associating Himself with the repentant Jews at the baptism of John. “But Jesus answering said to him, Suffer it now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). Again, prophetically it is said of Him, “He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed” (Isaiah 50:4). He brought God into His life every day and for every detail. Sometimes people in an extremity will turn to God but the Lord Jesus was always marked by piety. We have a perfect example in Him.

He is now at God’s right hand having accomplished all things for God’s glory and pleasure and is become author of eternal salvation, to all them that obey Him. Surely then we ought to regulate our lives by such a one as our Lord Jesus. However, it is not exactly eternal salvation which is the greatest test to a believer. We come into that through a work that is done outside of ourselves, but it is as we are left here in our pathway through this scene and have to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling. (Philippians 2:12). First of all we must learn to accept where God has placed us. As we accept that we find grace and help in our daily pathway. We might think we would be better off if we lived somewhere else, or if we had some other employment,

or had been in a different family, or something like that. We might think, if things had only been different it would be so much easier to be a dependent christian. But as learning where God has set us we know that He is for us and that we can trust Him for every step of the way.

We read in 1 Timothy 3.16 of the “mystery of piety”. It is a reference to our Lord Jesus and it is a wonderful mystery. A brother referred to Emmanuel this afternoon. Emmanuel is “God with us”, God come down into our circumstances. The Lord Jesus came down into this world, into the circumstances of men, sin apart. Wonderful mystery, God has been manifest in flesh in our Lord Jesus.

Then it says here, “has been justified in the Spirit”. Every action of our Lord Jesus as a dependent Man was by the Spirit; He “by the Spirit of God cast out demons” (Matthew 12:28). He appeared to angels. In Gethsemane, Luke tells us, “And his sweat became as great drops of blood, falling down upon the earth”. Before that it says, “And an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him” (Luke 22:44, 43). How the angels were affected at that hour!.

Angels are those who are sent out as ministering spirits on account of those who are the heirs of salvation. As we put ourselves into God’s hands He has resources to help us and to strengthen us. He gives us the Holy Spirit for our entrance into spiritual things, but there is also a countless number of angels. You may find yourself in danger but God has His own resources for your help and protection. I believe that was proved by some of those who suffered in that awful catastrophe in New York a few weeks ago. There were believers miraculously saved out of it, without a scratch, and used in testimony for the blessing of those around them.

Now there are certain things which come in to divert us from the path of faith. In 1 Timothy 4 the apostle gives us a warning about the kind of things; it says, “the Spirit speaks expressly, that in latter times ...”. We are in the latter times, immediately prior to the coming of the Lord. And it says, “some shall apostatise from the faith”. These are persons who take up a pretence of superior piety, speaking things that do not come from God Himself. They forbid certain things, such as marriage and the eating of meat. These are things that the creator God has provided for the benefit of the creature. Such

things have come in amongst christians and are a denial of the temporal mercies of a creator God.

As believers we have some understanding of the mystery of piety in that we know Jesus as our Redeemer and Saviour, and also the One who is the Creator because by Him all things were created. This gives a fresh appreciation of our relationship with a creator God so that we accept temporal mercies with thanksgiving. So our food is “received with thanksgiving ... and freely addressing him”. There is thus communion with God in relation to the things that we enjoy so freely from His hand. The believer who is purchased by the precious blood of Jesus has an appreciation of what God gives him in moving through this scene. The believer does not abuse it but uses it according to the way that God has given it and recognises that the God who has given it is the same God who has redeemed us. This is also a feature of piety.

We are to be “nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which thou hast fully followed up. But profane and old wives’ fables avoid, but exercise thyself unto piety; for bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but piety is profitable for everything, having promise of life, of the present one, and of that to come”. All sorts of strange and superstitious ideas have been introduced amongst christians, including the worship of angels, which is condemned elsewhere (Colossians 2.18). There is so much false teaching around which casts a shadow on, and often subverts, the truth of God. We need to be watchful of these things. Paul does not condemn bodily exercise; some may be necessary, particularly in these days when so many use mechanical transport. Nevertheless, it is only profitable for a little - piety is profitable for everything!

There is nothing for which piety is not profitable. Piety will help you in your employment or at school. If we bring God into things it will help us. He will help us and He preserve us too, from the things that are going on around in every sphere of life. What a great thing it is to exercise piety.

It adds, “having promise of life, of the present one, and of that to come”. Are we thinking of that to come? God is going to bring in a world according to His own thoughts where Christ is the centre and where everything is for God’s pleasure, when He will demonstrate, in this very scene which is so torn by strife and corruption, a reign of righteousness and peace and blessing.

Then God will come into the world's circumstances publicly, and we shall reign with Christ.

Chapter 6 of 1 Timothy warns us against going in for riches, which leads to temptation and a snare. In contrast, piety with contentment is great gain. We often hear of those who have achieved wealth or, say, have won the national lottery, and find it brings them sadness and sorrow. There is no point in going in for this world's goods. The person who trusts God and is satisfied with their circumstances finds peace, which is great gain. Some may have little, some may have much; some may have much testing, some may appear to have an easy life; but where there is simple piety, we shall find there is great gain.

There are those who in going in for riches have pierced themselves with many sorrows. As we read further down in this chapter, "the love of money is the root of every evil". God has warned us about these things and His thought is that we should be content with our circumstances.

So piety is an answer to the difficulties of the last days. The epistle to Timothy warns of the dangers of the present time. There is apostatising from the faith in chapter 4 and the dangers of materialism and the love of money in chapter 6. Then we are aware of the promulgation of the equality of faiths taught at school and elsewhere, all seeking to turn persons from the christian faith. How needful therefore that we should regulate our lives according to God and prove the preservation and gain that is found in piety .

Piety involves bringing God into the detail of our everyday lives but He has in mind that we should go in for the things which He has provided for our spiritual blessing, because He "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Our real blessings are spiritual and heavenly. God may give material things but that is not the point of christianity. God's blessings are spiritual and can be enjoyed only through the Spirit of God because spiritual things are communicated by spiritual means. Hence, a spiritual person is one who makes way for the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit would direct us to Christ and to the scriptures. He would give us an understanding of Divine things. In Christ we find our wisdom and resource. The princes of this world in their worldly wisdom did not recognise the Lord in their midst and they crucified Him. That demonstrates the wisdom of the world and what it is worth. They did not understand that God has

determined that Christ is going to rule over the whole universe. By the Spirit we draw wisdom from Christ because He “has been made to us wisdom from God” (1 Corinthians 1:30). The passage refers to God’s wisdom in a mystery; it is a mystery to the uninitiated because it is hidden in Christ. We can obtain all the wisdom that we need in Him.

A spiritual person goes in for spiritual things. Because of their state the apostle had to say to the Corinthians that he had been unable to say the things to them which he wanted to say because they were carnal, they were occupied with things here, and were biting and devouring one another. Where there is strife and contention a spiritual man should be able to resolve matters; as it says in Galatians 6:1, “ye who are spiritual restore such a one ...” It is a challenge as to whether we really make way for the Spirit of God as we ought, so that any differences can be settled and division avoided.

Because of the state at Corinth reference to the spiritual is put in the third person. Paul says “the spiritual discerns all things, and he”...(that is individual) “is discerned of no one”. A person who is spiritual is an enigma to the world. Sometimes he is an enigma to fellow believers too!

Paul says, “we have the mind of Christ”, that is, the thinking faculty of Christ. In other words, to think as the Lord would think about something. When he says “We have the mind of Christ” I think he was referring to himself and to Sosthenes the brother. I doubt if he was able to so refer to the Corinthians. However it is something that we should be concerned about to be true of ourselves, that we should have the mind of Christ. Well, the way to it is making way for the Spirit of God, and being occupied with spiritual things.

If God is taking care of our things it is that we might be set free to enter into spiritual things. Oh, that there was more piety, and more spirituality and that we might learn from Christ and the Holy Spirit. May it be so, for His Name’s sake.

Donald Macphail

An address at Blairgowrie, 27 October 2001