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# *Living Water*

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# **WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE**

**1 Kings 17: 1-15**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The journey of the Christian through the world is often likened to the forty years the children of Israel were in the wilderness with all its challenges, failures and problems. Most of our time is spent in the wilderness. There are times when we can know the joy of the Lord's own presence but mainly our life is spent in the wilderness and it is a long road.

It is not in mind that we should follow the detail of the Israelite journey, but rather to look at these three scriptures as showing certain things that should mark us as we proceed through the wilderness.

## **ELIJAH DURING THE FAMINE**

The first scripture deals with a time when idolatry was running rife in Israel. The worship and service of Baal was going on. Without any warning, Elijah appears upon the scene. We see from this scripture the great importance of depending on God. When we first came to the Lord (and I hope every one of us has come to Christ) we had to learn the great lesson of christianity, that we had to trust in the work and the Person and the word of the Lord Jesus absolutely. As we go through the wilderness, that does not change. We have to trust in God. The resources available to the widow, her son and to the prophet seemed extremely slender, but in actual fact there was abundance, beyond any expectation, because they trusted God: "The meal in the barrel did not waste, neither did the oil in the cruse fail". The total amount that the widow, her son and the prophet ate would have been enormous by the end of the year. The result of dependence upon God was that they were greatly blessed.

Elijah is sent to Zarephath, the city from which Jezebel originated! God placed a prophet, and maintained him, and a widow and her household, in the very centre of Baal worship and service.

Elijah was sent to Ahab with a message from God that there would be no rain or dew for three and a half years. Elijah, then, had to live with the

consequences of that word from God. He had to hide himself by the torrent Cherith and watch the water dry up. The prophet was affected by his own word. In giving words we have to learn that the first edge of the word is for us, not for others.

The ravens fed him. He had to learn dependence on God in a very practical way. Dependence flows from a personal knowledge of God. God spoke directly to Elijah. There was a personal relationship. It was not an unusual thing for Elijah to be in the presence of God. He speaks of God as the One “before whom I stand”. There was a long history there. He knew God and he had listened to God’s word. We read here that he went and did according to the word of Jehovah. Then later it says, “and the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the torrent”. Divine provision was there; every morning and evening these birds would have come with something. It would have been a great confirmation of faith. It would have been the same when he was with the widow woman; every time that they went to the barrel, the meal would have been there.

Elijah was told to hide himself away from the public gaze and he had to live in total dependence upon God. He had to be prepared to go out of sight himself and to leave every hope of Israel behind. In these days we have to accept the public ruin of the church and put our hope and dependence entirely in God. Then the ravens fed Elijah. The raven is an unclean bird – it is a bird of prey yet God used an unclean creature to bring food to Elijah to sustain him.

Elijah would have been exceedingly tested. To be dependent upon God tests us. Are our spirits contented in that position? Elijah had no choice in his diet; he had to receive whatever was provided. This went on for a long time yet God looked after Elijah in every detail. We can depend on God; Scripture confirms it over and over again. He will not let us down. Things may not be the way we would want them, but God is always faithful.

In the house of the widow to whom Elijah was sent we find there was a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a bottle. The meal speaks to us of the evenness of the wonderful humanity of Jesus, and the oil of the

Holy Spirit. There was a handful of meal. A handful is what you are equal for. When Egypt brought forth in the years of plenty the Spirit of God tells us that the land brought forth by handfuls (Genesis 41:47). You might have said they had bushels or another dry measure that would have been far larger than a handful. But a handful was the amount the priest took out of the oblation and offered up to God. It is man's measure. There is always food for us in the manhood and humanity of Jesus to sustain our hearts, minds and souls. That would sustain us. How wonderfully Jesus lived here in dependence upon God – a feature of His humanity.

In sending Elijah to Zarephath, God said, “ I have commanded a widow woman there to maintain thee”. Elijah was maintained, but not only he, but the widow and her son as well. It is beautiful to think about this scripture in the context of a local assembly. The church is maintained, sonship is maintained and the prophet is maintained. These precious features of sonship, God's word and the truth of the church are maintained in the Spirit's power however few there may be, even in the very place of idolatry.

The meal and the oil multiplied. Every day there was enough to feed the house. The meal did not waste and the oil did not fail. For us, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the preciousness of the humanity of Jesus are enough to sustain us while we are down here.

### THE WIDOW AND THE UNJUST JUDGE

Where we read in Luke the focus is upon prayer. The key to the parable lies in the introduction, “that they should always pray and not faint”. Prayer is the outward manifestation of our dependence upon God. It is the evidence that we belong to and depend upon God. All should be marked by continual prayer. Dependence upon God was seen in the Lord Himself and it is very delightful to God when He sees it in us. In Luke's gospel the Lord is found praying eight times. This conveys an impression of how dependent upon God He was.

The scope of this parable in Luke extends from the time when the Lord was speaking until the final day of the tribulation: “Will not God avenge his elect?” The Lord's words go beyond the immediate, into the day when the Antichrist and the false prophet will be in full evidence and the elect

will almost have come to the end of their tether. That is the scope of the Lord's words. For us the lesson is continuance in prayer. In christianity, things are not maintained by systems and structures but by prayer and dependence on God.

The early believers "persevered" in prayer (Acts 2:42). We are exhorted to watch in prayer (Colossians 4:2). In Hebrews we are encouraged to draw near to the throne of grace and so find mercy and grace for seasonable help (Hebrews 4:16). There is no question about the mercy and grace; they are there. No matter what season you go through, the Lord will give you grace. Whether it is winter or summer in our spiritual history we will receive grace from the Lord Jesus.

We have all been puzzled at times when we have prayed for things that are right in themselves yet they have not happened, or there has been a very long time gap before there is an answer. Such situations are the proving of faith that Peter speaks of (1 Peter 1:7). The result in God's mind is that something should be built up in us as waiting for His time. This parable does just give us a little insight into that. We read: "And shall not God at all avenge his elect, who cry to him day and night, and he bears long as to them". It is not only those that are persecuted, "the elect", that God bears in relation to, but He bears patiently even with those who may be persecuting believers. The story of Saul of Tarsus would show this. We know a God of immense grace. How powerful and gracious and glorious God is. There is nothing He cannot do. All things are possible to God.

There are several prayers recorded in scripture: Paul prays that, "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him" (Ephesians 1:17). In our local companies we should be praying for spiritual progress. Paul's prayers will finally be answered and will be seen to be answered.

We read, "...by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7). It says nothing here about the answer to the prayer, but it shows that entrance into the divine presence causes change with us.

We need assurance that God hears our prayers and will answer even if it is not immediate answer. The Lord said here where we read that we should “always pray and not faint”. Daniel, in the Old Testament, is an example of one who continued in prayer. He prayed three times a day, possibly for many years. He knew that his prayers were in accord with the mind of God even though Jerusalem was in ruins. He prayed at the time of the evening oblation, though there was no evening oblation going on at the time because the temple had been destroyed and the Jews were in captivity. He never lost sight of God’s great thoughts for His people.

In Romans we read that, “we do not know what we should pray for as is fitting” but “the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness ... makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26). Do not give up praying, even when things seem difficult and hard.

It is interesting to see the doxologies in Scripture that arise from wilderness conditions. The times when things look blackest are the moments when the highest notes of praise are touched. In drawing near to God we find strengthening and the soul begins to flow out in praise to God. It is not the circumstances that are changed, but the person.

### THE WORD OF THE LORD

The passage in Isaiah emphasises the reliability of God’s word. We read: “The grass withereth”. Man in all his glory withers. “The flower fadeth” — all his assumed glory, celebrity and fame fades and dies. “But the word of our God abideth for ever”. Jesus said, “The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall in no wise pass away” (Luke 21:33). We can rely on God’s word. It has been proven time and again and will still be proven. That is what this section brings out.

The context of the scripture is the fact that the Jews are going to be delivered from Babylon. Isaiah in his prophecy is speaking about Cyrus who is going to let the Jewish captives go. He said, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her time of suffering is accomplished” (Isaiah 40:1, 2). This was two hundred years before it happened but you can count on God’s word. He even names Cyrus two hundred years before he is born as the man who is going to bring about deliverance and send the captives home.



It had never been heard of in the history of the world that a triumphant victor sends his prisoners away homeward. It happened here. God says to Isaiah, “Cry”, and Isaiah says, “What shall I cry?” He is to cry: “the word of our God abideth for ever”.

Babylon in all its magnificence was going to fade away and the glory of Nebuchadnezzar was going to come down to the dust, but the word of our God is going to abide forever.

It is a very striking scripture. God’s word is going to abide forever. It can be depended upon. It is bedrock. God is not going to alter it. What He has said He will do; what He has promised He will carry out. It is very sustaining to the soul.

With God there is “no variation nor shadow of turning” (James 1:17). One of His titles is “the Same” (Psalm 102:27). God is the Same; He does not change. He does not change His mind. He established what He was going to do before time began. He is not going to deviate from His purpose. Haggai brings in a similar thought, “The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and my Spirit, remain among you” (Haggai 2:5). The unfaithfulness of the people in Haggai’s time did not alter God’s thoughts. “God is faithful, by whom ye have been called ...” (1 Corinthians 1:9). God is not going to change His mind. If He has said it He will do it. If He has promised it He will carry it out. That would encourage us; the church will go through.

This amazing prophecy predicts the Lord Jesus coming in. Yet that is not the only thing: “Make way for Jehovah our God”; it is the kingdom, the restoration of Israel, the building up of Zion. It is going to happen. It was fulfilled in Jesus, but it will be fulfilled again. The prophet comes to the amazing conclusion that Babylon’s glory is going to depart. Nebuchadnezzar was very powerful, “whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive” (Daniel 5:19). He was utterly despotic but he was going to come down, too. The glory was going to fade. But God’s word, that He was going to restore His people and take them back again, was not going to fail.

This was glad tidings to these people. “Comfort the heart of Jerusalem, her suffering is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned for she has received

of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins". Isaiah has this vision that that word is going to be fulfilled in two hundred years time. It is going to happen! God's word is not going to change — it abides forever.

*Based on a Bible reading with Philip Robinson.*

*Woking, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2005.*

## **WHY IS IT THAT EVERY TIME JESUS CALLS YOU, YOU FILL YOUR MIND WITH OTHER THINGS?**

**“And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and of the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”** (Mark 8:31)

I went to the dentist last week – the fourth time in three weeks. It is the same routine every time; you go in and you sit in the chair, the dentist presses a lever and you lie back looking at the ceiling. You open your mouth and the dentist pokes around and puts various bits of metal in your mouth. As I lay there last week staring at the pictures on the ceiling it occurred to me that I trusted this man an awful lot. I could not see what he was doing, I had no idea whether he was drilling in the right place, I just trust that he is doing the right thing. I do not know much about my dentist. I know he is keen on sport because among the pictures on the ceiling is one of him with his rugby team and another of him running in the London Marathon. I know what his children look like because there are pictures of them too. I know where he lives because the insurance document on the wall says “Wadhurst, Kent”. That seems a lot to know about someone, but I do not really know him. He is not my friend, yet I lie there and I trust him.

Have you ever noticed in the gospel how that is what you are asked to do with the Lord Jesus? You are asked to trust Jesus. It says in the Bible that He suffered on the cross to bear our sins and take all God's righteous anger and judgment and He asks you to believe in Him, to trust Him. You have never seen Jesus. All you know about Him is what you read in the Bible, yet God is saying, ‘Trust Him’. If you do not listen to the rest of the

preaching, just understand this: the Bible tells you that you need to come to Jesus and ask Him to forgive you your sins and you need to believe and to trust Him, believing that what He did on the cross was to suffer for your sins and take them away. The Bible is very clear; many, many times in the Bible you read of people – people just like you and me – who have stained their lives with sins. They have been selfish, told lies, been filled with pride and done many things which mean that they cannot be in God’s presence, done things that cannot be put right. Then the same Bible tells you that Jesus came to suffer for our sins and that you can be forgiven if you will trust in Jesus. This is important. Will you trust Him?

Where we read tonight, Jesus was saying to His disciples that He was to suffer many things and to be rejected and killed. If your father or mother said to you completely seriously, ‘I am going to be killed shortly and before I am killed some very horrible things are going to happen to me’ — do you think you might just listen? Jesus said to his disciples, who loved Him and had lived with Him for three years or so, that He was going to be killed. Peter said “God be favourable to thee, Lord; this shall in no wise be unto thee” (Matthew 16:22). The Lord said to him, “Get away behind me, Satan, for thy mind is not on the things that are of God, but on the things that are of men” (Mark 8:33). Then the Lord went on to teach them something. Look at verse 34, “Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me”. When the Romans crucified someone they made him carry the cross on which he was to be executed to the place where he was to be crucified. A condemned man carried his own cross as a sign that they were submitting to the power of the Romans. It was a sign of submission for everyone to see. Jesus says that if anyone desires to follow Me “let him deny himself, and take up his cross...” They were to do something; they were to submit themselves to Jesus.

I do not want to make this complicated. What I want you to understand is that there is an awful temptation for every one of us to do what pleases us and what we prefer to do. Most of the time in your life, if you are given a free choice you will probably do what pleases you. Everybody is like that — you choose what best pleases you and that is what you want to do. Yet Jesus is saying that you are going to have to deny yourself if you are

going to follow Him and you are going to have to take up a cross. Then in verse 36 Jesus says, “what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?” If you choose the things that please you all the time and you keep doing that in your life, if you are very successful at it, and gain everything you have ever wanted, even to the whole world, Jesus says, ‘What good would that be if you have lost your soul?’ You have no place in heaven. You have chosen other things that are more important to you than Jesus. You are without God and without hope.

What good is it to you if you have all the material possessions in the world – the house you wanted, the car you wanted, the husband you wanted, or the girlfriend or the boyfriend, what good is it to have all those things? When you get to the end of your life not one of them goes with you and you have lost your own soul. But this is not just about what happens at the end of your life, whether you are going to heaven or hell, it is about your life now! Today, tomorrow, Tuesday, what good is it if you get what you want and lose your own soul? What good is it to you, since God has told you in the Bible the way to satisfy your soul now and for ever and yet you choose some other way because it pleases you!

Now, Jesus said, the Son of man was going to suffer many things and be rejected of the elders and be killed and the third day rise again. You see, those to whom He was speaking, like everybody else had this problem with self and feeling important and wanting what they wanted and they were going to have to put that to one side if they were to follow Him.

If you look at Mark 9:31 we find that the Lord was walking with them through Galilee, going to Capernaum, and He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of man is delivered into men’s hands, and they shall kill Him; and having been killed, after three days He shall rise again. But they understood not the saying, and feared to ask Him”. The Lord is telling them that same thing for a second time. You would think that when the disciples heard for the second time that the Lord was going to be killed that it would have dominated their thoughts. Well, when they came to Capernaum Jesus asked them what they had been talking about in the way. What did they say? ‘We are unhappy about what we have been told and we do not understand it’. Is that the kind of things they said? No.

They were silent, because by the way they had been reasoning who was the greatest. Do you find it odd? Jesus had just said to them that He was going to be delivered into men's hands and be killed and what they talked about was who was the greatest! They were thinking about their importance and what pleased them. Jesus told them that if anyone would be first, he shall be last of all. If they wanted to be first they had to serve others. Being greatest in God's things is not being heroic; it is about serving, about humbling yourself, about doing things that other people might not want to do, about pleasing others.

Twice the disciples heard Jesus say that He was to suffer and be killed and each time they needed to be reminded about not being selfish and pleasing themselves.

Now, if we turn to Mark 10:33 we find the Lord saying, "...the Son of man shall be delivered up to the chief priests and to the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him up to the nations: and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and after three days he shall rise again". It is not just that He is to be delivered up, not just to be taken away, not even just that He is going to be killed, but also that He is going to be mocked, scourged and spit upon. He was their Leader, their Master, their Friend and they loved Him. Were they worried or upset at what He told them? Look at the very next words! James and John come to Him and say, "Give to us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy glory". The Lord had just told them that the most horrible things were going to happen to Him and James and John come along and say, 'What about us? Can we have a great place? Can we be the most important people in the kingdom? Can we have lots of praise?'

Why is it, that so often when the Lord tells them that He is going to die, the disciples bounce up with, 'What about me?' Why is it that every time Jesus has called you and spoken to you and asked you to come to Him for forgiveness of your sins, why is it that every time you have filled your mind with other things, with things that you want to do, things that you want to think about, other things that are more important to you? Why is it so many times now that you have heard the gospel, so many times Jesus

has called you, and so many times you have just let your mind drift and be filled with other things, school, work, dreams?

What Jesus is saying is serious and important. What sin does to you is to make the things you like, the things which you choose, seem more important to you than anything to do with Jesus. It has to stop! You reach a point when you have to stop and you have to actually make a decision for yourself that you really want Jesus and you ask Him to forgive you your sins and be your Saviour.

Jesus was scourged, mocked, and crucified because He loved you. You are no different from anybody else that has ever lived. All of us would rather think about anything else than God's Son. Yet He wants you. He is calling you. The hymn says: 'Jesus is calling you, Will you not come?' All you have to do is, from your heart, from right inside, speak to the Saviour, and tell Him, in any words you like, that you want Him. Tell Him that you want Him to be your Saviour and forgive you your sins and He will! Just believe and trust Him for what He did 2000 years ago on the cross. He bore your sins. Believe Him. The Bible says that He is the only hope, the only way that your sins can be taken away. That is what the Bible says. I have found it to be true for me personally. Maybe you have as well, or maybe you have not. Tonight is your opportunity to come to Him and have your sins forgiven.

On every one of these three occasions we have read about when Jesus spoke of His being killed, He always added that He would rise again on the third day. Jesus is alive! In the latter part of the gospels and in the beginning of the Acts and in other places in the New Testament too, you find people who saw Him. He is a living Saviour available to you today. In some of his writings the apostle Paul expresses the wonder he had in his heart that, despite what he had been, the Lord had called him. That is how I feel, that of all the millions of people in the world, the Saviour came even to me. I just wonder tonight if He has come even to you. If you know that Jesus is speaking to you just speak to Him, tell Him you want Him in your heart tonight and ask Him to be your Saviour.

*Tim Pons*

*A preaching of the gospel, Eastbourne, October 2005.*

## **AN EXHORTATION**

Enthroned your God within your heart,  
Your being's inmost shrine;  
He does to you the power impart  
To live the life divine.

Seek truth in Him with Christ-like mind;  
With faith His will discern;  
Walk on life's way with Him, and find  
Your heart within you burn.

Serve Him in His sufficing strength:  
Heart, mind and soul employ;  
And He shall crown your days at length  
With everlasting joy.

*William J Penn (1875-1956)*  
*(Contributed by Malcolm Wallace)*

## **ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED**

### **Ephesians 1:6**

Oh wondrous truth made known,  
In righteousness, but not my own,  
I stand in Christ, in Christ alone –  
Accepted!

His love shines forth on me!  
The precious blood hath set me free,  
And not one stain doth God now see –  
Accepted!

In beauty all complete,  
I worship at the Saviour's feet,  
For glory through Himself made meet –  
Accepted!

My endless theme shall be  
I am “in Christ” and Christ in me,  
His face at last mine eye shall see!  
Accepted!

*J. H. Bathgate*

## **IN CHRIST ALONE**

In Christ alone my hope is found,  
He is my Light, my strength, my song;  
This cornerstone, this solid ground  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of grace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease;  
My Comforter, my all in all;  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone who took on flesh,  
Fulness of God, yet helpless babe;  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save.  
Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied,  
For all my sins on Him were laid.  
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the tomb His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain,  
Then bursting forth in glorious day,  
Up from the grave He rose again.  
And as He stands in victory,  
Sin’s curse has lost its grip on me,  
For I am His and He is mine;  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.



No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can ever pluck me from His hand.  
This is the power of Christ in me  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
Till He returns, or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand,  
Till He returns, or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ alone.

*Stuart Townsend*

**LOOK UP**  
**(Luke 21:28)**

Look up, ye saved, the star is in the sky,  
The coming of the Lord is drawing nigh:  
Look up, that glorious morning soon will break  
When He, the Lord of Glory, comes to take  
His waiting people home.

Home to the Father's house, with Him to share  
That home with all the loved ones gathered there.  
Trophies of grace, bought with His precious blood,  
Who died that He might bring us home to God,  
His house to fill.

Lord Jesus, may we all more faithful be.  
The little while we're waiting here for Thee,  
To speak a word in season here and there,  
That others may our wondrous portion share  
In that eternal home.

*Mrs Bessie Barter*

*Contributed by Mrs Barbara Taylor*

## **“HE MAKES THE WRATH OF MAN TO PRAISE HIM”**

**(Psalm 76:10)**

David Hamilton was arrested in Northern Ireland for his part in Loyalist terrorist activities involving bombings, murders and armed robbery. New Year's Eve in 1979 found him pondering his future in jail. He thought, “I don't suppose that the New Year will be any different from last year”, but he reckoned without the power of God. Unknown to him there were people praying for David every day, praying that the Lord would change his heart.

One evening he came back to his cell and found a tract lying there. He looked at it long enough to realise it was about the second coming of Christ, then he screwed it into a ball and threw it out of the cell window. Yet something was started in his mind by that tract and he kept thinking, “I should become a christian”. It seemed an incredible idea. Part of him said “I don't want to be a christian”, yet he could not get the idea out of his mind. It was there day after day; when he woke in the morning it was the first thing that came into his mind. In the end he decided to speak to a christian about it.

The only christian in the jail that he knew was a fellow prisoner called Trevor who was serving a life sentence for murder. Two years into his sentence this man had come to trust in Christ and from that time he had witnessed to his new found life in Christ to anyone who would listen. Many of the other prisoners thought he was mad, but it was to Trevor that David went to one day and said “I'm thinking of becoming a christian but I don't know what to do”. Trevor's response was immediate; he gave David a great hug and a lot of tracts.

Later, back in his cell, David read the tracts and he seemed to see the whole of his past life over again and he saw how God had preserved him and brought him to just this moment. There in his cell, he asked Christ to come into his life and cleanse him from his sins. David got hold of a New Testament and read the whole of it in three days. God worked mightily in his soul during those days in a wonderful answer to the prayers that had been made for him by several christians ever since he had been arrested.

The reality of God's work was soon put to the test because many of the other prisoners mocked him. Then, as time went on, he began to speak to others in the Maze Prison; God honoured his witness and several came to know Christ.

In 1981 several prisoners in the Maze went on hunger strike. David and the other christians prayed that the hunger strike would end. Liam McCloskey, one of the hunger strikers, ended his fast on the 55th day and while recovering in hospital he also trusted in Christ.

The greatest test of David's faith came in quite a different way. His wife took up residence with another man and this man assaulted David's young son so badly that he required hospital treatment. David's understandable anger was boundless and when a few years later the same man was arrested for another offence and put in the same prison as David, it seemed that the time for revenge had come.

The first time David met him, he told him he was going to kill him as soon as he could. Back in his cell David's anger burned ever more fiercely as he thought of what had happened to his son; and then it came to him what had been done to God's Son at Calvary and David knew that he had to exercise forgiveness. A few days later he did find himself alone with the offender. Seeing the fear in the other man's face, David said to him "I forgive you, because Jesus has forgiven me everything". What a witness to the power of God!

## **A WORD TO CHRISTIAN SERVANTS**

In the early 1900s there were in England many people, including many christians, who earned their living working as cooks, housekeepers and other servants. These were not confined to great houses, but many small businessmen and others employed domestic servants to carry out duties in the household. The 1901 Census showed the servant group was among the largest groups of the employed. It is against this background that the following Word to Christian servants was given.

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The Lord has given much instruction in His word to those who, like yourself, are engaged in service. The position of a Christian servant is a very important one. It should not be regarded as a mere means of livelihood – so much work for so much wages – but consider how you would serve Christ in your master or mistress' place, and so serve them. For the apostle says, "be

obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, with singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men” (Ephesians 6:5-7). What a high privilege this is, to bear in mind, in every little detail of your daily service, that if rightly done, it has immediate reference to the Lord Himself who will reward you for it (v.8). (See also Colossians 3:22)

Sometimes a Christian servant is the only witness for God in a house. How careful such a one should be to give all honour to his or her master, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed (1 Timothy 6:1). Remember, too, if you serve a believing master, he is not the less your master, because also a brother in Christ, but he is the more entitled on that account to your respect and service (1 Timothy 6:2).

I find that the Scriptures have not thought it superfluous to exhort a Christian servant to strict honesty, exhorting them not to purloin but to show all good fidelity (Titus 2:10).

Yet some are more liable to offend in word than in deed. Remember then that servants are expressly exhorted not to “answer again” (Titus 2:9). There may be provocation sometimes, but this only renders that injunction more necessary to be remembered. It is not a question of who is in the right or the wrong – but the precept is absolute and unqualified not to “answer again”. Then Peter says, “be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the ill-tempered” (1 Peter 2:18).

A beautiful pattern of faithful service is given in Genesis 24. Is not Abraham’s servant an example of prayerfulness, devotedness and singleness of heart to those in similar positions? Indeed it was the reading of that chapter that suggested the few lines I am now writing. Remember, too, that it was a few words spoken by a maid to her mistress, which brought about the cure of Naaman and his acknowledgment of the true God. The glory that was brought to God and the blessing that was brought to Naaman, originated in a maidservant. Does this not teach us something?

Think of these things, and by the grace of God you will not fail to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things” (Titus 2:10).

*G. J. W.*

## **THE END (2)**

(The end of a servant's course)

### **2 Timothy 4:6-8**

It carries with it a good deal of exercise when you take up the question of your service. Most of us have to say that we have been unprofitable servants. That may be the course of your life, and the sense you have in your life of service. I hope it is so! I am very sorry for those who are satisfied with the way they have done anything, because everything could have been done better than the way we have done it, but what is going to be the end? You see that in Paul. He was ready to be offered up. It really means that he was ready to return to the One who had given him his service here. He says: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith". Those are the three demands that are made on a servant.

"I have fought the good fight". Never give up. Revelation refers to a certain company with evident appreciation "who loved not their lives unto death". If all Asia turned away from him, he would go on – alone if necessary. Yet no one will be left alone. It is amazing to find how many there are with one when one fights the good fight.

Then he says, "I have finished the course". What does that mean? It means, that he had gone from earth to heaven in his spiritual experience. Many a servant fails because he does not see that and hence he ministers a ministry in relation to the earth. Paul says, 'I have finished my course, I have gone from earth to heaven, and I have given a ministry, that in God's grace, will be calculated to take believers that way'.

Then, most important of all, "I have kept the faith". What is that? That unseen things had never lost their importance in the eyes of Paul. No matter how he was flattered or presented with pleasant prospect of popularity, he never allowed his eye to be turned away from those unseen things which are eternal.

Then he refers to the pleasure of his Master; He says, 'He has a crown laid up for me'. You will be surprised to see what the Lord crowns. It may not look much, but when it is crowned it is amazing; things that were

done in simplicity and devotion, when they have received the crown, the final touch from Christ, you will say, 'Did I do that? Well, I would not have recognised it'. No, nor would anyone. That is the pleasure that the Lord will give Himself, and take the opportunity of putting those who have served Him in many small ways in a light in which they have never seen themselves. Paul says that this is "Not for me only, but for all those who love his appearing".

Well, How will we be? Are we diligent, are we fighting the fight, are we keeping the faith? Let us be ready as those who await their own Lord.

*E. J. McBride (1931)*

*In the next issue, God willing, "The end for the people of God"*

## **THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE**

### **Matthew 20:20-28**

When the sons of Zebedee come and ask Him for the first two places in the kingdom, He answers that He can indeed lead them into suffering; but as to the first places in His kingdom, He could not bestow them, except (according to the Father's counsels) on those for whom the Father had prepared them. Wondrous self-renunciation! It is for the Father, for us, that He works. He disposes of nothing. He can bestow on those who will follow Him a share in His sufferings: everything else shall be given in accord with the counsels of the Father.

What real glory for Christ and perfection in Him, and what a privilege for us to have this motive only, and to partake in the Lord's sufferings! What purification for our carnal hearts is here proposed to us, in making us act only for a suffering Christ, sharing His cross, and committing ourselves to God for the recompense!

The Lord then takes the opportunity to explain the sentiments that are appropriate to His followers, the perfection of which has been seen in Himself. In the world, authority was sought for; but the spirit of Christ was a spirit of service, leading to the choice of the lowest place, and to entire devotedness to others. Beautiful and perfect principles, the full bright perfection of which was displayed in Christ. The renunciation of all things, in order to depend

confidingly on the grace of Him whom we serve, the consequent readiness to take the lowest place, and thus to be the servant of all. This should be the spirit of those who have part in the kingdom as now established by the rejected Lord. It is this that is appropriate to His followers.

Observe the way in which the sons of Zebedee and their mother come to seek the highest place, at the moment when the Lord was preparing unreservedly to take the very lowest. Alas! We see so much of the same spirit. The effect was to bring out how absolutely He had stripped Himself of everything.

These are the principles of the heavenly kingdom: perfect self-renunciation, to be contented in thorough devotedness; this is the fruit of love that seeketh not its own – the yieldingness that flows from the absence of self-seeking; submission when despised; meekness and lowliness of heart.

The spirit of service to others is that which love produces as the same time as the humility that is satisfied with this place. The Lord fulfilled this even unto death, giving His life a ransom for many!

*J. N. Darby*

## **MY BROTHER'S KEEPER**

**Genesis 4: 9-11**

**13: 1-2**

**14: 13-16**

**Ezekiel 33: 1-9**

**Acts 20: 17-38**

The early chapters of Genesis provide very humiliating reading for any person who has a right sense of the place in which man was set in this earth in relation to God. The history of man's departure from God is most humiliating. In these early chapters we trace man, as so set, disregarding his responsibilities. We see Adam disobeying God, and then Cain killing his brother. These are the two great relationships in which man is set, first in relation to God, and secondly, in relation to his brother (or neighbour). This was the import of the young lawyer's answer, when he spoke to the Lord in connection with what is written in the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ... and thy neighbour as thyself". (Luke 10:27).

We see how failure came about in reference to these relationships at the very outset. It is not that man failed in a confused state of things such as we have around us at the present moment, a state admittedly of great difficulty, but man departed from God in the face of the very best conditions. When surrounded by everything that spoke of the beneficence of God he disobeyed God. That was the first departure. Secondly, what we see in Cain is that he arose and slew his brother, and having shed his blood, seeks to throw off all responsibility, saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?" That is a solemn scene, for the departure is complete. Yet, it is not a picture of unrelieved gloom, because in this state of things we see the work of God coming into evidence. There is nothing more calculated to keep our hearts in restfulness than to consider the wonderful character of God's work. An example is seen in Enoch. Think of that man in the midst of such conditions. The work of God in him was such that "he walked with God" and "he pleased God".

Turning now to Abraham we see in a remarkable way the progress of the work of God. It is noticeable that in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews more is said of Abraham than any other of the Old Testament worthies, because he represents in a marked degree the development of the work of God. When God called, Abraham obeyed. There may have been hindrances and hesitation, but on the whole he was marked by obedience. With regard to Abraham we see that the principle of disobedience, which marked man, is displaced, and obedience comes into view. We see further that Abraham was prepared to make sacrifices.

Abraham was marked by obedience and sacrifice. Rather than allow contention between himself and his brother Lot, he was prepared to surrender. When the land was not great enough to bear them both, Abraham could say, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we be brethren". One of the evidences of the work of God is that we are prepared to sacrifice in relation to peace amongst believers. Not that divine principles are surrendered. God forbid! But those who are going on with God, and in whom there is a work of God, would be prepared to make immense sacrifices in order that peace might be maintained. So Abraham says, "You choose for yourself; if you go to the right, I will go to the left", and Lot chose the well-watered plains towards Sodom.



It might be said that Abraham was well rid of him, that now he can move in accordance with the thoughts of God for him, and follow up his pilgrim pathway, and that Lot had disappeared altogether, but that is not God's way. Abraham hears that Lot is taken captive, and he brings all his resources to bear for the recovery of his brother. Abraham has been concerned as to the resources of his own house. He has three hundred and eighteen trained servants, and these considerable resources are all brought into the rescue. Let us seek in our measure to build up spiritual resources, so that when the moment comes every resource is at the disposal of the people of God for the recovery of a brother in Christ. The work of Satan is thus undone. Not only did Abraham obey God, but also he saved his brother. Cain could say to God, as he did with such assurance, "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" refusing all responsibility in regard to his brother. Abraham accepts the position according to God, and Lot is brought back. Abraham is his brother's keeper. May we never forget it.

In Ezekiel we have the thought of the watchman, and in the first six verses of chapter 33 it appears to be a question of the government of God. "When I bring the sword upon a land", the watchman is to be on the lookout and warn the people. There is the principle of warning by those who are walking so near to God as to distinguish when there is that developing amongst the people which must surely call down God's hand in government. The warning note is sounded for the saving of the people. You recall that those of the household of Chloe had informed the apostle Paul that there were things at Corinth that were unsuitable to the name of the Lord, and which must eventually call down the Lord's hand in government. Indeed, we read, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:30). The household of Chloe had sounded the warning note; the apostle gives his powerful trumpet-blast, and the situation as a whole is saved. It is easy to reproach ourselves after disaster has taken place, but the thought is that we should be so near the Lord that these things which threaten His inheritance, and His joy in it, might be detected, and that by warning and ministry the situation may be saved. We are set in relation to one another, not to find fault with each other, but to seek the spiritual prosperity of each other. How often we have had to deplore that the things that cause trouble have been overlooked until disaster has come. May God give us this feature of faithful-

ness in regard to that which is precious to Him.

In the next section the evangelical position is dealt with. A man is set to warn the people so that if the wicked man turn from his way he is saved, but if he dies unwarned, "his blood will I require at thy hand". If the wicked man is warned, and he turn not from his way "he shall die in his iniquity", but "thou hast delivered thy soul". This raises a very serious question with us. God has made Himself known as a Saviour God. He would have all men to be saved. There is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all". Having the light of this, think of the position in which we stand in relation to a world going on to judgment. Recall the apostle Paul testifying both to the Jews and Gentiles repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He took account of men, "became all things to all men", that he "might by all means save some". Not that he joined them in what they did, but he viewed things from that standpoint in order to save some. How he sounded the warning! "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish". He accepted the position in relation to men in this world, for he said, "Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel". We can say of him that he was his "brother's keeper", and he "delivered his soul".

With reference to the scripture in the Acts, we have the very widest way in which one can be clear of blood. The apostle is seen as his brother's keeper, and when he gives this address he says with definiteness, "Wherefore I witness to you this day, that I am clean from the blood of all, for I have not shrunk from announcing to you all the counsel of God". Why was it he did not shun it? Why did he need to use that expression? Because the telling out of the counsel of God involved him in very great suffering and reproach. Then he says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock". He is speaking to those who had oversight in relation to the church. There are those who have special oversight, but there is not one forming part of the church that is exempt from the obligations connected with it. The church is very dear to God: it was "purchased with the blood of his own". Can we say that we, in our measure, find our delight in relation to this precious interest of God and of Christ here on this earth? How much time and thought do we spend in relation to it?

The apostle then turns to the difficulties, saying, "know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them”. He was warning the people beforehand of what should come in, not only from outside, but from within, in order that Satan might not gain an advantage over the people of God. What a comfort! There are difficulties around and troubles within, but the work of God is going through. Do not forget that. We read in Matthew, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it”. Do not make any mistake. God will not be defeated. He has set His church here; it is not that it is set away in glory, out of the reach of any enemy, but it is set in the very presence of the power of Satan. It is not unassailable — assailed, as it is, on every hand; but it is invulnerable. That which Christ is building is going right through. How it cheers our hearts in the face of what may seem to be outward weakness, that the church is to come out for the praise and glory of God eternally. “Therefore”, Paul says, “Watch”. He would set everyone on this principle of watching. In the beginning of Corinthians we have the household of Chloe watching. At the end he enjoins all to watch. “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13).

He would not only have one household, although one household could save the situation, or it may be that one person may have to stand and save the situation, but he would have them all watching. So here he says, “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears”. Suffering is involved, for these things are not just doctrines; they are practical realities and the pathway of fidelity is a pathway of suffering.

The apostle then speaks of his personal conduct, to call attention to what he had been amongst them. “I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel”. Those who serve God must be free from any spirit of covetousness. So the apostle reminds them that, “These hands have ministered unto my necessities”, and “to them that were with me”. You remember (Luke 10:35) that the Samaritan left the two pence with the host, and said, “Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee”. He gave him that which would meet the situation, but in tender grace He leaves the door open for the possibility of a further expenditure in relation to His interest. So the apostle says, ‘I am going to take advantage of that open door. It has been left to me to care for the

people of God, and I am going to spend a little more in that precious service, for I am going to provide not only for my own necessities, but so that I shall have something left for others' — those that were with him. He said, "I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved" (2 Corinthians 12:15).

Let us commend to each other the expenditure of that little more in the precious service of Christ. He says, "When I come again I will repay thee". He will repay that service Himself — precious touch between the Lord and those who seek thus to serve Him! Then Paul says, "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak". The Lord Jesus was ever on the side of the weak one; His compassions were ever in evidence where there was weakness. "And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive". Did not He know, for He gave not only all that He had, but He gave Himself!

The apostle then kneeled down and prayed with them all. Holy emotions are now in evidence. "They all wept". They saw in the apostle the features of Christ and, weeping, they fell on his neck and kissed him. They are all together. They accompany him to the ship, "Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more". It is a world of sorrow. There are partings on this side, but the moment is coming when all the people of God will be present in yonder eternal home. when God's complete victory will be displayed, and when Christ's love shall have its full response, when tears are wiped away, and every divine thought has found its full accomplishment. Then God will dwell with men. The voice says, "It is done" (See Revelation 21:6). It is the voice of One who, coming out of eternity — stepping across the thresh-hold of time — said, "Lo, I come ... to do thy will, O God". He has done the will of God; He has finished the work that was given Him to do. He has secured everything for God and God shall rest eternally in His love. Oh, may God haste that day! God and men in that unclouded light! What a God! What a Christ, to have brought it all to pass!

*E. B. Griffiths*

*An address at Belfast, April 1931*