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## ***Living Water***

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## Recent Ministry

# “THE WAY”: THE JOURNEY OF LIFE OF THE BELIEVER IN THE LORD JESUS

Psalm 139: 1-6, 23-24

Acts 19:8-9; 24:14-16

Genesis 24: 32-48

I want to speak about *“The Way,”* particularly in the sense in which it is spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles, that is to say, the journey of life which the believer individually and also with others takes through this world as committed to the Lord Jesus, led of the Spirit and desiring to be pleasing to the Lord.

**The thought of a way  
did not begin with the  
New Testament**

I think it is important to emphasise that the thought of a way—and a right way—did not begin with the New Testament. According to the light which God saw fit to grant to His earthly people in days before, there was a right way for

them together and a right way for each one of them as individuals. Therefore I feel free to draw not only on the New Testament but also on the Old for what I seek to say.

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Psalm 139 is very interesting; we might say it is a case study of what it means to seek God and His way. It is an interesting psalm from many aspects. It opens up from the standpoint of David, the psalmist, realising that God has full and perfect knowledge of him (see v. 2-5 & 1-13). To begin with he is rather apprehensive about this, as any of us well might be; if God knows all about us—all that we have done and what we are thinking and what we say before we even get round to saying it—that might well be a cause of some anxiety as we remember who God is and what His assessment may be of what we say or do. But David then moves on to being conscious that it is actually a blessing that God knows him better than he knows himself. That

is something for every believer in the Lord Jesus to come to: that it is a mercy and a blessing that God knows us better than we know ourselves. By the end of the psalm he is dismissing those who are opposed to God with whom perhaps earlier he might have felt some sympathy, and he concludes with these striking words: *"Search me, O God" (v.25)*. To begin with he was having to speak about God knowing anyway. But at the end of the Psalm he is asking God to search him and to expose him to himself, *"prove me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any grievous way in me" (v.24)*.

In verse 3 he says, *"Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways"*. That is to say that God knows what I am doing. He knows whether I am seeking to do what pleases Him or whether my ways are just what pleases me. But by the end of the psalm what David is saying is, *"see if there be any grievous way in me"*. He would love to have exposed to himself where he really stands before God. Then he adds, *"And lead me in the way everlasting"*; it is a very wonderful thing that he should, even in his own day, be conscious that there is a way that God can lead us in and which has blessing and eternal life connected with it.

So you see this psalm takes us through a great range of experience from what begins as a fear of God, and then a recognition that God is favourable to David and that it is a blessing that God knows him so well. Then, finally, David makes an appeal to God Himself to direct him into the way everlasting. That is something that I commend to all of us. Many here know more about the *"way everlasting"* than I do but I still commend to every one here that they might seek the *"way everlasting"*. It is personal here. You can be thankful that if you embark on that *"way everlasting"* you will find others who are like-minded about it, but it is a great thing to take it up for yourself. If you wait for others to do so you may wait too long: you have to make these things personal.

What is personal in scripture is very well balanced with what is collective and there is a great need of personal commitment. There is a particular need of it in these days, when believers are

very much exposed to the world and are obliged, often, to find their own way personally and sometimes without any support from their fellow believers. It is important in such circumstances to be assured that there is a *“way everlasting”* in which God would lead us.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now I come to these scriptures in the Acts which have some more to say about the way. In chapter 19 Paul has freshly arrived at Ephesus. Now, we are inclined to think of Ephesus in two particular ways, and both of them are in scripture. One of them is that they received a very wonderful and blessed letter from the apostle which has been kept on record by the Spirit so that you and I should profit from it as well: the epistle to the Ephesians. And then, there is another epistle which they received in Ephesus and you will find that in the early part of the book of the Revelation (see Revelation 2:1-7). Things have not prospered there and the Lord has a severe word of warning to them.

But it is interesting, in this chapter, to see how things developed. There were evidently some who really did not have a full knowledge of the gospel at all. Paul asked them *“Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye had believed? And they said to him, We did not even hear if the Holy Spirit was come. And he said, To what then were ye baptised?”* One can understand him almost feeling some surprise about it. *“And they said, To the baptism of John”*. That gave the needed clue that they had been committed to John’s ministry but Paul was able to say straightaway, ‘Yes, that is right’. John had the baptism of repentance and that laid a firm foundation but John had something more to say; *“that they should believe on him that was coming after him, that is, on Jesus”*. At that point, they were very ready to take up what Paul had said. It says, *“the Holy Spirit came upon them ... And all the men were about twelve”* (Acts 19:1-7).

But now Paul is, rightly, looking for further material. He went into the synagogue and he spoke there boldly for three months. He did what he often did; he drew out from the scriptures the things concerning the kingdom of God. No doubt he was prospered

so far, but then there were some who were hardened and disbelieved and they spoke *“evil of the way”*. Now, that shows that it was not just the example of these Christians who were committed to the way that was spoken against but it was the way itself.

All that they represented, all that had come to light as a result of Paul's testimony and their testimony there, they saw—these Jews, I suppose, in particular—that it was a way that was quite different. It was a challenging way that ran against everything that they had ever subscribed to, things that had made so much of themselves and they were *“hardened and they disbelieved”* (v.9).

What Paul then did was something which he clearly had to do: *“he left them and separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus”* (v.10). We do not, now, have much to do with synagogues but we do have plenty to do with those who are hardened and disbelieve. While we are to maintain a right testimony to such, if we are to be kept in the way the only thing to do is to do as Paul did: he separated the disciples and took them elsewhere, where their souls could prosper. There is no suggestion in the scripture that the school of Tyrannus was a consecrated building or anything that you or I would recognise as a Christian meeting place. It was somewhere that was available and what was valuable there was not the surroundings but the fact that the disciples were there and Paul and his ministry were available to them.

If you are going to be in the way it is most important that you should be there with a good conscience. We will come on to that in a different sense in a moment but there is such a thing as your conscience before God being right and simple as to the truth to which you are committed and which you seek to put into practice. There are many believers who are in circumstances that they do not find at all congenial and where they find it very hard to work out the truths that are found in scripture and which in their heart they fervently believe. This verse is a reminder to us that there is, in fact, a remedy and I think believers are called upon to act

upon the remedy that this scripture presents. I am not, of course, seeking in any way to advertise or condemn particular companies of believers but rather that you and I in our souls should be challenged as to whether our way of life and our associations of life, particularly of the Christian life, are such as will enable us to be prospered in the way. And, if so, we may need to follow through the exercise that Paul set on here of separating the disciples so that their souls might prosper.

I leave that there but I feel constrained to say it as having read through these references to the way in the Acts of the Apostles and noticing that the way was something that actually caused controversy. It still does. You do not have to look very far in the newspapers to realise that the religious world is not much in sympathy with what you would find in the Bible as to what Christianity is. I am not setting out here to condemn individuals. I trust, among other things, that the pains that many of us have experienced in our Christian life have taught us to speak carefully and soberly about such things. But there is a need to have your conscience liberated before God if the Lord graciously gives you the light to see that what is in scripture is the way. It is the “*way everlasting*”. It is the way into Christian blessing and it is a way which we need to follow up if we are to enjoy the things of God in a full sense.

I move on to this other reference in Acts to the way which is in a very interesting context. You will know that Paul had come up to Jerusalem and from there he had found his way beset with difficulties. He says himself, earlier, that they were not unexpected. You and I might wonder about whether Paul was right and wise to go up to Jerusalem at this time. But, in any case, here is Paul and he finds himself before this Roman governor (Felix) who, history shows, was a worldly and corrupt man but, nonetheless, there was a witness, a testimony, to be borne to him.

Acts 24 is a very interesting chapter because, among other things, it illustrates several aspects of what we call the flesh. The flesh is the old man that is in us all. Believers, as coming to the Lord



Jesus Christ, are given the power to be delivered from the snares and wickednesses of the flesh, though we all still find we have it with us. But, in this chapter, you hear from some unregenerate men. It is just as well to see what they were like. Men, at the beginning of the chapter, have come down from Jerusalem, including an orator, Tertullus, and they are set on traducing Paul and getting him condemned. To set that forward they begin with a whole load of flattery (see Acts 24:1-4). That is one aspect of the world with which we want nothing to do at all: flattery, which inflates man. Governor Felix was not in any way deserving of all the nice things that were said about him.

Then we have Felix himself. The latter part of the chapter shows that he was interested in what Paul had to say. Paul *“reasoned concerning righteousness, and temperance, and the judgment about to come”*. Felix was thoroughly frightened: those three things, he knew, condemned him and so he said, *“Go for the present, ... hoping at the same time that money would be given him by Paul”* (v.25-26). That is another aspect of the corruption that is in the world. I am afraid we have no choice but to go through a world that is marked by corruption. The great need is for you and me—with the help of the Holy Spirit, and with our eye on the Lord—to be kept free from it.

Here is the testimony that Paul gave: *“but this I avow to thee, that in the way which they call sect”*. So Paul took up the word *“the way”*. He knew that his enemies regarded it as a sect, the *“sect of the Nazaræans”* as Tertullus had said. *“So I serve my fathers' God, believing all things which are written throughout the law, and in the prophets”* (v.14). You and I can do exactly the same. The God who is spoken of in the Old Testament is the same God as the God of the New.

He is revealed to us in our Lord Jesus Christ in a way quite distinct from anything that went before but it is one and the same God. The light that Paul received was that it was one and the same God and he sought to serve that same God. You see in his epistles how his knowledge of the Old Testament and the ways and word of God in the Old Testament were brought to

bear upon what he now knew of the gospel.

That is why we are free, as the Spirit may help us, to draw on the Old Testament for gospel words and for words of encouragement and edification: it is one and the same God. Paul had not given up believing what was in the law and the prophets — nor should you and I. We need to know how to handle the law, although I take it that when Paul was speaking he had particularly in mind the first five books of scripture which were generally known as ‘the law’. We do need to know how to handle Old Testament scriptures; let us keep an eye on the epistle to the Romans and the epistle to the Galatians as we do so. But it is all scripture and it is all for our help.

And then he says that a distinctive feature of what he believed at this point was that there was to be a resurrection, *“a resurrection both of just and unjust”* (v. 15). Well, I did not have in mind to go further into that save to say that that is the great hope of the Christian. Paul, in these verses, did not expound the underlying truths of the gospel but he drew attention to something he knew had divided the Pharisees and the Sadducees in his earlier testimony (see Acts 23:6). But he says that looking forward to the resurrection gave point and direction to his life; *“For this cause I also exercise myself to have in everything a conscience without offence towards God and men”* (v. 16).

I commend to my brethren that one simple, elementary mark of being in the Christian way is that you and I seek to do what Paul did here, to have in everything a conscience without offence towards God and men. It is a demanding standard and we all know that we come short of it. But that is the standard of conduct as a believer goes through this world. From time to time we hear of things which are very disappointing in the way that Christians may see fit to behave. I am not speaking now of being overtaken in a fault but things which people seem to think are all right to get away with, and so forth. Paul would never have thought of getting away with anything: he sought to have a good and clear conscience.

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Now I turn to the book of Genesis. I am aware that this chapter is often, and rightly, taken up as illustrating the service of the Holy Spirit in regard of securing a bride for the Lord Jesus, but it is not what I had in mind to speak of just now. What has impressed me for this occasion is the way that spirituality shows itself in regard of *"the way"*. The errand on which Abraham's servant was sent was a very important one: it has a bearing on all subsequent history. Abraham had a strong desire that his son Isaac should be married to someone of his kindred. And, again, that is a very apt illustration of the desire of the Lord Jesus Christ that those who belong to Him and form part of His bride should be like Himself. We see this at its choicest in the second chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews where the apostle says, *"both he that sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one"* (*Hebrews 2:11*).

You and I may not find that very easy to understand, but that does not make it untrue! Indeed it is a vital truth of Christianity that those who are redeemed to God by the blood of Christ and who receive the Lord Jesus are born of God. You will find that abundantly confirmed in the first chapter of John's gospel and as being of that family we find ourselves to be like and kindred to our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why He is able to speak to His disciples as His brethren. It is His great desire that we should not only be like Him as a matter of the truth but that it should weigh with us and affect us in our souls. We should seek to make these truths our own, that they should not just, as it were, remain a lovely picture but that we should be deeply conscious of the grace of God which has called such as you and I are to be like and, as it says in scripture, to be kindred to our Lord Jesus Christ.

At this point I am going to divert for a moment. If you and I, as believers in the Lord Jesus, are kindred to Him and seek in practice to be like Him, to be joined to Him as one Spirit with Him, when it comes to the point in our lives that Isaac was coming to, it is of the utmost importance that we should follow through the truth of this scripture and find our wife or husband to be among those who are kindred to our Lord Jesus Christ. I feel obliged to

say this because it is apparent that not everyone feels that way. But I have been on the road a good many years like others of my brethren here and I commend to us all, but especially our younger brethren here, that it is absolutely vital for your soul welfare and the prosperity of any marriage that you may undertake that you should be together in the things of the Lord.

Paul brings it out in the first epistle to the Corinthians where actually he is speaking of someone who is widowed and who might be thinking of re-marriage. He says that is all right but *"only in the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 7:39). Make sure your marriage is in the Lord. Forgive me speaking in this way, and I do not say it in any sense unkindly but rather as having very much on my heart what is the best for you and for me. This scripture seems to me to amply bear it out, because it shows the importance that Abraham attached to it and that we should do well to attach to it too.

But, as I said, I wanted to speak of what was spiritual in the way that this servant proceeded. You see, spirituality is profitable in every way and it really means bringing God and the Holy Spirit in particular into what I do. Here is this man who has been given a difficult and delicate service to perform. He had been sent out to seek a wife for his master's son.

At the point where we began to read he has reached the house that seemed to be his destination and he begins to pour out how he had got there. He speaks well of Abraham his master, how God has dealt with them and the promise that Abraham has required him to make, to find the right sort of bride, someone that would belong to the same family. He has looked ahead and has raised the question that he might find the right person but perhaps they would not come! Abraham has given him a word that, *"Jehovah, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way"*. Here is Abraham speaking and the servant being faithful to his word. He has confidence in Abraham in the same way as you and I do well to have confidence in God. If we are setting about what is right we can look to God for His help and support.

**we have here a  
godly man seeking  
to do what is right  
in the sight of God**

So the servant reached the well. The next thing he did was to pray. He says, *"Jehovah, God of my master Abraham, if now thou wilt prosper my way on which I go... let it come to pass that the damsel who cometh forth to draw water, and to whom I*

*shall say, Give me... a little water out of thy pitcher to drink, and she shall say to me, Both drink thou, and I shall also draw for thy camels – that she should be the woman...appointed for my master's son"* (v.42-44). There were these two tests, a drink for the servant and then the offer to draw for the camels, which I think perhaps in those days would have marked her off as distinctively ready to be of service. He says, 'May that be just the right person'.

Now, I am not using this occasion to go into the merit of signs but I do draw attention to what the servant did by way of casting himself upon God and asking Him to make His direction and mind plain. And here it is, he says, *"Before I ended speaking in my heart, behold, Rebecca came"* (v.45). There it was. *"I said to her, Give me, I pray thee, to drink"*. She immediately made provision and said, *"Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also"*. So he knew that it was the right one. But yet there was another test and the servant did not forget the commitment that Abraham had caused him to make. He says, *"Whose daughter art thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him"* (v.47). And at that point he knew that it was the right one, that she did belong to the right family.

So we have here a godly man seeking to do what is right in the sight of God and his master and getting direction and being prospered as he goes. Then he did something else which is vital: he gave thanks. It is all too easy when God has prospered our way to get on with the prosperity and forget about how it came about. *"I stooped, and bowed down before Jehovah; and I blessed Jehovah, God of my master Abraham, who has led me the right way to take my master's brother's daughter for his son"* (v.48).

When the man embarked on a way which he needed to go, he was not certain what the outcome would be. As he went along he prayed about it. He asked God for clear evidence that he was on the right course. God granted it to him and when God had granted it he gave thanks.

I just commend that as a simple course that all of us might seek to follow. As the tests and difficulties of the way come up, pray about it, watch for the answer and give thanks when you get it.

May the Lord help and encourage us, for His name's sake.

David Burr

*An address at Hampton, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012*

## From "Living Water" No 19

### CHRIST – THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

#### Ephesians 5:22-27

God has made Christ to be head over all things to His church. Now, is He head to each one of us? Where do we look for our direction, for our guidance? I read from Ephesians 5 because the thought of Christ's headship is developed there. We could have read the verse at the end of chapter 1:- *"...and has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."* It is remarkable to speak about the assembly as the fullness of Christ; how great the assembly is! The Head is Christ in heaven and His body is here on earth. The body expresses what the head would direct; that is how it works out in a human body. The head gives the thought, the direction, and the body puts it into expression. That is the divine concept; the church is to move through this world expressing what Christ is in heaven above. Where do we take our direction from?

That is why this letter to the Ephesians becomes exceedingly practical in the second half. We read some of these verses: *“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord, for a husband is head of the wife, as Christ also is head of the assembly”*. *“Submit yourselves”* –well, it is not a time to be hard on the sisters, because the brothers have a head too. Sometimes perhaps we may lord it over our wives and say, ‘I am the head of this house’. But that is not love’s way. As a man I have a Head in heaven too. Man’s head is Christ and Christ’s head is God (see 1 Corinthians 11:3). The church’s Head is Christ.

Can you ever think in the day to come of the church telling Christ what He should do or not do? It is unthinkable! All the wisdom and divine resource rests in Him. He shows us what is suitable to the conduct of believers. Where do we find it? The directions are in His word. Yet, sadly, how easily we may set out our own standards regardless of what the word says. If we take the ground of being true believers, let us be guided by the Lord’s word. He has given an order of things that is for our blessing and the order of headship is just one thing that is for our blessing. The way we deport ourselves, the way we are to love one another, these things are to be seen in the church; if they are not seen in the church there is little chance of them being seen anywhere. In a day of brokenness, it is open to us to hold on to these truths and in our Christian walk and gatherings to seek to walk in accordance with these things.

James Bryan

*Extracted from an address at Chippenham, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1996.*

**If there is an article, or part of an article, from a back number of “Living Water” that you would like to see reprinted I would be very glad to hear from you. Ed.**

## Poetry Selection

### **TO MAKE CHRIST KNOWN**

Facing a task unfinished,  
That drives us to our knees,  
A need that, undiminished,  
Rebukes our slothful ease,  
We who rejoice to know Thee,  
Renew before Thy throne  
The solemn pledge we owe Thee  
To go and make Thee known.

We bear the torch that flaming  
Fell from the hands of those  
Who gave their lives proclaiming  
That Jesus died and rose.  
Ours is the same commission,  
The same glad message ours.  
Fired by the same ambition,  
To Thee we yield our powers.

O Father who sustained them,  
O Spirit who inspired,  
Saviour, whose love constrained them,  
To toil with zeal untired,  
From cowardice preserve us,  
From lethargy awake!  
Forth on Thine errands send us  
To labour for Thy sake

Frank Houghton (1894 – 1972)



## **ONE DAY AT A TIME**

Tomorrow, Lord, is Thine,  
Lodged in Thy sovereign hand,  
And if its sun arise and shine,  
It shines by Thy command.

The present moment flies,  
And bears our life away:  
O make Thy servants truly wise,  
That they may live today!

Phillip Doddridge (1702 – 1751)

## **Testimony Section**

### **MY TESTIMONY**

I was born in Preston in 1957, the joint second eldest child of a family of six children. My mother died in 1981. I have three sisters, one of whom is my twin, and two brothers. Our religious upbringing was Roman Catholic and we all went to a Catholic school and attended mass every Sunday and often during the week as well. I remember being told that our beliefs were the correct ones according to God. I was encouraged to embrace the teachings of the church and became an altar boy. I went to Confession every Saturday and as a penance for my sins I was told to recite certain prayers. I was also told that God would forgive my sins if I prayed to God and to Mary.

When I was about six years old I developed a stammer. I became very nervous and found it difficult to communicate as I would have liked. As the years passed I became less interested in attending mass and confession and I stopped going, probably in my mid teens, as did my brothers and sisters. Our parents left us

to make up our own minds about religion and did not pressurise us to return to the church.

I remember thinking about my eternal future from time to time and concluded that I would never really know if I would get to heaven. I knew I had not kept all the Ten Commandments and, steeped as I was in Roman Catholic teaching, I thought I would probably have to spend a short time in a temporary hell, called Purgatory. As I grew older I wondered whether the Bible was true or relevant at all.

I left school in 1972 and entered into a printing apprenticeship. When this firm closed down I was employed by the Lancashire Evening Post where I worked until 1989, when I took voluntary redundancy. Not long afterwards I got work with another printer and by this time I was playing the guitar and singing in various music groups and we gave concerts at various clubs and pubs.

Around 1982, when I was again made redundant, I re-kindled a friendship with a girl called Jasmine. She told me that she had recently become a Christian and I was intrigued to know what had happened to her. I knew her well enough to realise that she was sincere and I was impressed with her strong faith in Jesus, though I had no desire to have what she had—a personal relationship with God. Also there was a friend of my sister's, called Vincent; he had "found God" and his life had taken an entirely different course. I met him in the Preston Job Centre and he explained what the Bible said about God and salvation. He asked if he could bring a Bible to my house and I said, 'Yes', just to keep him quiet. I did not read much and I had no intention of reading the Bible. Little did I know that both these people were praying for me; looking back, I am so glad that they did!

Jasmine lent me some books about the Christian faith and I read them but I could not understand much of what they said. Vincent gave me some tracts to read and even though I could not grasp the gospel message, I said the prayer at the end of one of them and waited for something to happen. Nothing seemed to change and I wondered if God had heard me or if I had really meant the

prayer from my heart. I was still going to the pub and doing sinful things but gradually I began to change. I became more aware of God and I began to read bits of the Bible at home. I decided that if the book was true I had to be personally convinced of it. One time when I was reading—somewhere in the Psalms, I think—I began to cry. The seed of God’s word was being sown in my heart. But all this time I had not been able to make the connection between Jesus’ death and resurrection and myself personally. I could not see my sinfulness or my need of salvation. The more I tried to see it, the more impossible I found it. I became frustrated and a little worried.

Then one Saturday morning in April 1994 I was reading a tract. The writer drew attention to the preciousness of the soul and the perfections of Jesus—perfections that showed that He must be who He claimed to be—the Son of God. That came to me as a revelation and it changed my life from that moment on. I saw that I had not trusted in Jesus and that was what I needed to do. I suddenly understood the gospel. I got down on my knees and told God that I was sorry that I had ignored Him all my life and I thanked Jesus, in the best way I knew, for dying on the cross for me. He died for me!

I was transformed inside. My bad language ceased and I was overjoyed that the truth had been revealed to me. Soon my family and friends noticed the change that had taken place. Some said I had been brain washed. Well, yes, I had been washed in the precious blood of Christ. I could not help but share my faith because I was so excited but I made the mistake of thinking that many people would believe through my explanation of the gospel to them. When nobody became saved it was a little disheartening but I knew that it was true whether they believed or not. I was baptised in November 1994 and have learnt much of God since that time. At one time I had trouble accepting that God was my Father and I will never forget the day that He showed me that He is my Father. I wept and wept as His amazing love filled me. Those special times, together with the Bible and Christian fellowship are a real source of strength in the Christian pathway.

My Christian walk has had wonderful highs and some painful lows but I understand that suffering is an important part of this life and that my faith will be tested. I recall what James tells us, *“Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into various temptations, knowing that the proving of your faith works endurance” (James 1:2-3)*. Then in Philippians we read: *“having confidence of this very thing, that he who has begun in you a good work will complete it unto Jesus Christ’s day (Philippians 1:6)*. I have preached at my church on many occasions. Only God could have given me the ability to overcome my fear of public speaking and my stammer and I praise Him for that.

I now have everlasting life as a free gift because I believe in Jesus. There is nothing I can do to earn God’s favour. My sins have been taken away and will never be counted against me because Jesus has paid my sin-debt in full. *“So if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17)*.

Please pray for my family’s salvation.

Steve Kelly

### **Steve also expressed his testimony in verse:**

This is a testimony of God’s amazing love,  
Of how He took this poor lost soul and called him from above.  
I’ve never known such gracious love, it overwhelmed my heart.  
And I’ll evermore be thankful for the grace He did impart.

I was raised a Roman Catholic, like so many others,  
I went to Mass on Sundays with my sisters and my brothers.  
I heard a kind of Gospel from the priests and teachers then,  
But no one told me Jesus said: ‘You must be born again’.

As I grew up I lived for self and God was left outside,  
I couldn't see my need of Him for selfishness and pride.  
One day I met a friend I knew from many years ago,  
He said I needed Jesus, but I didn't want to know.

He gave me a Bible but I left it on the shelf,  
I did not want to read it, I was trusting in myself.  
But when I finally looked at it I knew that it was true,  
I had some serious thinking and repenting now to do.

I was lost in sin and darkness, unable to receive  
The glorious gospel of God's grace, so how could I believe?  
I read the tracts and booklets that the Christians gave to me,  
But the more I tried to understand, the more I couldn't see.

Then one day in April nineteen ninety-four,  
God in His great mercy brought salvation to my door.  
The awesome revelation that Jesus died for me,  
Brought me to my knees in tears – I was blind, but now could see.

I told Him I was sorry for ignoring Him so long  
And I asked Him to forgive me for all that I'd done wrong.  
I know that I am safe in Him for all eternity,  
I am a new creation; the truth has set me free.

My life belongs to Jesus now and I have been made whole,  
No matter what may happen – my God is in control.  
He who began a good work in me will perform it to the end,  
I am so glad that I know Jesus as my Saviour and my Friend.

Steve Kelly (2003)

## ENCOURAGING VERSES

*Many people have a verse from the Bible that has been of particular encouragement to them. The results of a recent survey asking for such verses are given below. They are reproduced here so they might be an encouragement to others also. A variety of versions were used by those replying but for consistency all the quotations are given from the Darby translation.*

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*For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*(Romans 8:38-39)*

*Alba*

***But to him that is able to keep you without stumbling, and set you blameless before his glory, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, from before the whole age, and now, and to all the ages, Amen***

*(Jude 24 &25)*

*Charlie*

*And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return, and come to Zion with singing: and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

*(Isaiah 35:10)*

*Daniel*

***And behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age. (Matthew 28:20)***

*David*

*Never have men heard, nor perceived by the ear, nor hath eye seen a God beside thee, who acteth for him that waiteth for him.*

*(Isaiah 64:4)*

*Eric*

***Be careful about nothing; but in everything 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)*** **Garry**

*He who, yea, has spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him grant us all things? (Romans 8:32)* **Joel**

***Fear not little flock, for it has been the good pleasure of your Father to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)*** **Oliver**

*Confide in Jehovah with all thy heart, and lean not to thine own intelligence; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will make plain thy paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)* **Philip**

***Dost thou not know, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, Jehovah, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, nor tireth? There is no searching his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and shall tire, and the young men shall stumble and fall; but they that wait upon Jehovah shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles: they shall run and not tire; they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31)*** **Rhoda**

*...how much rather shall your Father who is in the heavens give good things to them that ask of him? (Matthew 7:11)* **Veronica**

## A voice from the past

# CHRIST TRIED BEFORE PILATE AND HEROD

### Luke 23:1-23

Here we pass from the council to Pilate's hall of judgment. We see in Pilate the character of the last beast of Daniel 7; a power ordained of God, but influenced by policy. Pilate was not like the Jewish leaders, marked by hatred of Christ. He represents a large section of this world, for he could discern that the One before him was not a criminal. He could form a judgment that there was no fault, nothing worthy of death found in Him; but his conduct was governed by policy, by what was advantageous under the circumstances that then existed. We also may be governed by the circumstances in which we are found. If I hold my peace when I might confess Christ because I think that it might bring me into trouble or not be acceptable to those I am with — I am standing beside Pilate. Are we prepared to stand by Christ in any circumstances? If Pilate had any true appreciation of Christ, he would have stood by Him at all costs. He was afraid of a tumult with the Jews, for he had a good deal of trouble with them and did not want any more. He was allowed of God to express his own righteous judgment publicly as to Christ, but at the same time he exposed himself that he was governed by policy. There are more Pilates than we think. But we cannot be neutral; we must be for Christ or against Him. Our position is that we are here for Christ; we are to stand by Him. His grace is so wondrous, His authority and power so great, and His personal glory so transcendent, that we must stand by Him at all costs. That is the position and no neutrality is possible. I feel humbled in saying this, for we all feel how much neutrality there is about us.

In the beginning of the Acts we see men who had forsaken Him and one who had denied Him three times, but they are standing in the immovability of rock as thoroughly identified with Him. Whether it is opposition, tumult, prison or death, they stand by Him without a shade of neutrality. They pray, for we can only



stand in such a position by prayer. Pilate was afraid of opposition and tumult, but they were not afraid; they stand by prayer, and we see in Acts 4 that the place where they prayed was shaken — God gave a manifest token that His power was with them. God supported them so that nothing could stand before them; all the powers of darkness fell before them.

Herod was a man with no conscience at all. He was only looking for some entertainment; he hoped to see some miracle done by the Lord. Pilate had a conscience but it was governed by policy; Herod had no conscience. The Lord called him a fox; he was slyly seeking his own interest, and his desire to see the Lord was only curiosity. The Lord has nothing to say to Herod; He would not minister to curiosity. When people try to make Christianity attractive to the natural man, it is just like bringing Christ before Herod, and the end result is He will be mocked and derided. God does not work that way, and we should not appeal to that kind of thing. If a man is only influenced by natural curiosity, the Lord has nothing to say to him.

Everything takes its predetermined course in view of the cross. The actions of men were all subservient to the designs of God that His grace should be perfectly set forth in the world. Man's hour and the power of darkness only served the purpose of bringing to light wonders that could not have appeared before. It is like the falling of darkness on the face of the earth, which gives the opportunity for the splendours of the heavens to be displayed, so that we can look up and see the handiwork of God. We can behold wonders and glories that cannot be seen in the light of day; the darkness gives them occasion to shine forth. As the power of darkness manifested itself in opposition to Jesus, it was just the time for the glory of God in grace to come out in all its holy splendour. The evil thoughts in the heart of man only served to bring out the precious thoughts in the heart of God.

C. A. Coates

*Extract from the "Outline of Luke's Gospel"*

## A word for today

### THE TIMES OF THE NATIONS

#### Daniel 2:24-49

I believe that God would help us at this time as to the period called the *"times of the nations"* (Luke 21:24) — an expression used by the Lord Himself — and that He would give us to understand why He has ordered these times, especially in the light of Paul's remark *"that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the nations be come in"* (Romans 11:25). It is an expression which, read in conjunction with Paul's ministry generally and the fact that he was the apostle of the nations and a *"prisoner of Christ Jesus for you nations"* (Ephesians 3:1), would indicate that the times of the nations were instituted with the present Christian dispensation in view. We know that the Old Testament prophets had not the light of this dispensation, yet it was in the mind of the Spirit of God; indeed it was part of the purpose of God from before time. So while the times of the nations have a great bearing on Israelitish hopes and God's dealings with Israel, they have a special bearing upon this dispensation when the fulness of the nations is being brought in.

It is important, therefore, that we should be intelligent as to what God has set up in the way of Gentile rule and the character of it, and be kept in the remembrance of the fact that it is His will that His people should bear testimony before rulers. That has been a feature from the beginning of the times of the Gentiles right on. Paul was to bear Christ's name *"before nations and kings and the sons of Israel"* (Acts 9:15)

We have read about the vision given to Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation. It brings out what Gentile rule is as ordained of God, and the various characters which mark it in God's ways. In a later vision in chapter 7, given only to Daniel himself, the same four empires depicted in Nebuchadnezzar's vision are seen as wild beasts. They are referred to there according to their natural

characteristics and their propensities are dreadful, especially when energised by Satan. But the viewpoint in Daniel chapter 2 is in keeping with Romans 13: 1-2 – that *“there is no authority except from God; and those that exist are*

**It is God’s mind that testimony should be rendered to Gentile rulers**

*set up by God. So that he that sets himself in opposition to the authority resists the ordinance of God; and they who thus resist shall bring sentence of guilt on themselves”*. We have, therefore, to regard this vision from that standpoint. The head of the image of fine gold, gold representing what is of God, brings out the great principle that there is no authority except from God. That is a remarkable statement, but it is there in Scripture.

In 1 Timothy we are exhorted to make *“supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings”*, not only for all men, but *“for kings and all that are in dignity”* (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Without an understanding of the times of the nations I am certain that we shall never know how to do that or even give thanks intelligently. Then, later in the epistle, the matter of confession is introduced, and the remarkable thing is that when Paul refers to the *“good confession”* (1 Timothy 6:13), it is that which Christ Jesus made before Pontius Pilate, that is, before the Gentile ruler, He witnessed the good confession; and that is what is in mind throughout the times of the nations. It is God’s mind that testimony should be rendered to Gentile rulers. They receive authority from God and they are responsible to God, and God would bring His representatives before them to affect their consciences in relation to the One who has given them authority and who is going to judge them for the way they have used it.

Nebuchadnezzar’s vision shows the varied features of rule which God orders during the times of the nations; the overriding feature is that there is *“no authority except from God”* – that is the gold. It was particularly manifested in Nebuchadnezzar’s empire, but the principle has remained ever since. Other metals come in

historically in the order given in Daniel 2, but the features of rule remain, because you will notice that when the stone smote the image, it says in verse 35, *“Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold broken in pieces together, and they became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors”*. That is to say that, although the principle that there is no authority except from God was manifested in its fulness in the Babylonian empire, the principle remains right through the times of the nations. Paul was writing in the time of the fourth (the Roman) empire, and he says, *“there is no authority except from God; and those that exist are set up by God”*. So that the gold has not ceased to be there; indeed the whole image still exists, for the stone struck the feet of the image, and then all the features which marked the image were broken in pieces together. In the Medo-Persian kingdom the silver element of rule came into view and while there is the idea of deterioration which is spoken of in verse 39, yet, I believe, there is also another meaning, and that is that in the Persian kingdom God introduced the silver principle into Gentile government; that is, He raised up rulers such as Cyrus who was himself the subject of prophecy in Isaiah 45, who considered for God’s rights over His people, and made way governmentally for His house to be rebuilt and His service re-established.

Then in the Grecian empire the brass came into view, for it was, generally speaking, a persecuting power, and, from the divine standpoint, a disciplinary power. Therefore the brass indicates that another way in which God uses Gentile rulers is for discipline, when He sees that the state of His people requires it. Lastly, the fourth empire, Rome, was especially marked by strength, as suggested in the iron. In the final phase of iron and clay, we can see the greatest deterioration, yet each phase is ordered by God. We are thankful for the strength of the iron – constitutional government such as marks the western world. But then there is the clay of democracy, yet used of God to afford liberty of conscience to His people.

So I think, if we get a view of these authorities, whatever their character, as being ordered by God, it will lead to worship and prayer, both of which are found in 1 Timothy, worship to the King of the ages and to the *“blessed and only Ruler”* (1 Timothy 6:15), and prayers for all men and *“for kings and all that are in dignity”*. If we pray to the blessed and only Ruler it should be in the light of what Daniel said, *“it is he that changeth times and seasons; He deposeth kings, and setteth up kings”*. The question is whether we are intelligent enough to know when a time or a season is to be changed. I am not suggesting a great change like a dispensational change; the Lord says in that connection that the Father reserves times and seasons in His own authority (see Acts 1:7); but we want to be intelligent as to present detailed changes. Paul speaks of *“the blessed and only Ruler ... the King of those that reign, and Lord of those that exercise lordship; who only has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen, nor is able to see; to whom be honour and eternal might”* (1 Timothy 6:15-16). I cannot think that one who could thus worship God would not know how to pray intelligently, according to 1 Timothy 2. It is important to see that one of the highest notes of worship in Scripture is expressed in relation to the matter of government.

Now, in the first six chapters of the book of Daniel, Daniel is the interpreter of dreams, but in the last six he is himself dreaming. It is God Himself revealing to Daniel that the empires were beasts. That is a private communication. You would not address the governments of the nations as beasts. The dreams given to Daniel are to prepare the people of God for what they have to face and to fortify them. If we have to come into conflict, through testimony, with Gentile powers, we have to be prepared for the fact that they are *“beasts”* in themselves, and therefore it will almost always entail a measure of suffering. As we are preserved in the light of God as the *“King of those that reign, and Lord of those that exercise lordship”* we would not fear a beast, however

wild. Paul said in relation to Nero that the Lord delivered him out of the lion's mouth.

In Daniel chapter 2 and also in chapter 7 God gives a great deal more detail as to the fourth and last empire than is given about the others which shows that, while in a primary sense the prophecy has to do with Israel and its hopes and sufferings, yet the whole of the church period was very much in the Spirit's mind. Christ Himself came under that empire and then there was to be this long period of time – a pause in prophetic history of two thousand years or so. The whole time from Nebuchadnezzar to Christ was only about six hundred years, but now we have the much longer period of the Christian era, yet it is still the times of the nations. The present period is a kind of pause in the prophetic record, when God is working out the greatest of all matters, and the fulness of the nations is coming in.

Following this period, nations as nations will come into blessing, but it will be a very short work. The prophet says, *"Shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her sons" (Isaiah 66: 8)*. There will be a rapid work, but nothing compared with the greatness of the work proceeding now. Therefore, in view of the importance of what is going on now, God would help us to understand the secret revealed to Daniel as regards Nebuchadnezzar's vision, as well as his own visions, so that we might be furnished in the knowledge of His ways as the *"blessed and only Ruler"*, and confide in God.

Now the features of the four empires, gold, silver, brass, iron and miry clay are carried down to our own times. While we are, in a sense, in the time of the fourth empire, it is a modified form of it. The western world is the 'follow-on' of the Roman empire, but it is a modified form of things, in which we can see clearly enough that the other forms of rule run on. First of all the fact that *"there is no authority except from God"* still applies. We are not yet at the time when the dragon gives his throne and authority to the beast. The principle of the gold is still with us; then, the

principle of the silver has come into view. God has raised up rulers, prepared by Himself, as instruments of government, who have been favourable to His people. That is all God's mercy, it is the 'silver' type of rule.

Then, the 'brass' type of rule runs on because, in its extended form, it is outside of the Roman empire. The Grecian empire was divided into four parts, and the part in which the brass particularly remains in evidence is the northern part, called later *"the king of the north"* (*Daniel 11:6*), and that power never comes into the orbit of the fourth empire. During this dispensation God has at times permitted men marked by that feature of rule to rise up – we have had it in our own day. We have been through two world wars marked by this feature of brass, God dealing in a disciplinary way with Christendom as a whole. There have been earlier examples of it in the Christian era. But then, over all, during this period, we have the iron. That is, we thank God for the stability of government in the western world, and yet there is the mixture of democracy – the clay – with its baseness. Yet even that God uses.

It emphasises the beneficial side of government, and would encourage our prayers that God may use all these things for the welfare and gain of His people. *"Wisdom and might are his"*, nothing can happen without God. Might belongs to Him. We must look beyond second causes and allow for His wisdom to operate in governmental matters. *"Wisdom and might are his. And it is he that changeth times and seasons"* (*Daniel 2:20-21*). In a way, we never know when they are going to change. The great change is about to come when the Lord Jesus will come, and His direct government will be established. Also we do not know when times and seasons, in a detailed way, may change. We have had favourable conditions in this land and we must still pray for them; but *"it is he that changeth times and seasons; He deposeth kings, and setteth up kings"*. I would think there is liberty to approach God in these matters. There are brethren, for

instance, in other parts of the world who face severe opposition from governments.

There is great significance attaching to what Paul says, *"I exhort therefore, first of all, that prayer... should be made for kings"* It is an urgent matter, and I believe the word "first of all" means that it is first of all from the standpoint of testimony. We have to keep in mind that Ephesians and 1 Timothy have to be read together. 1 Timothy is a complementary instruction to the epistle to the Ephesians. The latter brings out the great truth of God's habitation in the Spirit subsisting here on earth, in chapter 2, and the service which proceeds in it in chapter 3, ending with all prayer and supplication at all seasons with all perseverance for all saints in chapter 6. Now that is one side and that, no doubt, takes precedence; that is the great matter God has on hand, what He is doing in His people.. But then we have the instruction written to Timothy at Ephesus as to the testimonial aspect of the house of God. There is nothing more important from the testimonial angle than the kind of prayer in 1 Timothy 2. If a man comes into the Christian company and does not hear prayer of that kind, we fail to represent God in His own house. It is put before conduct; conduct comes next in the chapter; but the first and foremost thing in testimony is that anyone approaching God in His house should hear supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanks-givings for all men, for kings and all in dignity; if they do not hear that, God is not rightly represented in His house.

The Lord witnessed before Pontius Pilate as regards the truth, the whole truth. We must have in mind witness for the whole truth. It includes the rights of God and the rights of Christ. He also has rights over the church: the government must not interfere with that. So if governments seek to interfere with God's rights in His own house, we should approach them and the truth should be stated to them, because the power they are wielding is given them by God; they are responsible to Him. It is only fair to them that they should be warned as to what they are doing with the power delegated to them, because they will come into judgment



on that account. The Lord warned Pilate. The authority which belonged to Pilate was from above and that word was intended to strike home to Pilate's conscience: *"Thou hast no authority whatever against me if it were not given to thee from above"* (John 19: 11).

We read that, *"Daniel went in, and requested of the king"* (Daniel 2:16) and then in verse 25, *"Arioch brought in Daniel before the king"*. Many of us may have had misgivings as to whether we ought to approach authorities and with some there may still be such feeling. In Exodus we read: *"Jehovah said to Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh – behold, he*

*will go out to the water – and say to him, Thus saith Jehovah, Let my people go, that they may serve me"* (Exodus 8:30). That is another example of standing before the king and maintaining the rights of God. Here God is giving Daniel wisdom and might to stand in the presence of the

**The power operating with Paul was greater than any power he had met before**

king. It was the might of God that was in Daniel. I believe that is the great point to understand, that if God orders that His direct representatives should stand in the presence of earthly rulers, it is to the end that earthly rulers might be brought to acknowledge that the might operating in His direct representatives is greater than the power He has delegated to them.

We see in Nehemiah how it operates: *"Nehemiah prayed to the God of the heavens"* (Nehemiah 2:4), and God gave him favour with the ruler and a way was made for the people, so that the rights of God might be respected. Nehemiah was feeling his weakness, and so would anyone in that position. We would not get wisdom and might from God if we did not feel our weakness. God alone stands in His own strength. All other strength is derived; whether we think of inanimate bodies, like the sun, or whether we think of men or angels, all other strength is derived. No one

has any real strength except it has come from God. But the power with which He invests His people today is the power of the Holy Spirit. *"Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world"* (1 John 4: 4). If a Christian has to appear before a ruler, it has in view that the ruler should be brought to recognise that the might of God in the Spirit operating in them is greater than the power delegated to the ruler. There is an example in the New Testament with Paul before Agrippa. The power operating with Paul was greater than any power he had met before.

We can rest assured that if the power wielding delegated authority in this world comes into collision with the power operating in the believer, it will always be defeated. It may mean martyrdom but that power will always have to go down in the end. It is just a question of our being faithful and in a right state of soul to have divine support. Paul said, *"the Lord stood with me, and gave me power"*, (2 Timothy 4: 17). That is the secret of it. Paul was in the presence of the lion. The dreams to Daniel were to furnish the people of God and to prepare them for the character of things they would have to face. When the powers do come into collision with the people of God and reject the rights of God, their bestial character becomes manifest. Paul was in the presence of the Roman power in bestial character, and he said, *"the Lord stood with me, and gave me power that through me the proclamation might be fully made and all those of the nations should hear"*(2 Timothy 4:17).

In due time the stone cut out without hands smites the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Christ will personally bring down the image and sweep away the whole system of indirect government to introduce His own direct government in the earth. We read, *"in the days of these kings shall the God of the heavens set up a kingdom"*. I would suggest that that kingdom already exists; the Lord preached that the kingdom of God is drawn nigh, but in Acts it was preached, not as drawn nigh, but as established – (see Acts 20: 25; 28: 31, et.al). That kingdom has existed all through this dispensation. The kingdom of God is here and it is

set up in the days of these kings. While all these forms of government are going on, the God of the heavens has set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. In Hebrews we read: *"Wherefore let us, receiving a kingdom not to be shaken, have grace, by which let us serve God acceptably with reverence and fear. For also our God is a consuming fire"*(Hebrews 12:28-29). It is over against what can be shaken. It is a kingdom which, when it is manifested in its public character in Christ Himself will fill the whole earth. The kingdom is established now in order that every feature of service proper to the house of God might be maintained. Our testimonial stand in the governmental sphere is in view of the maintenance of all that is due to God in His house. We sometimes wonder how we should pray where governments are opposed to Christians. We need to supplicate God for change. I would pray against such governments as instruments of Satan but at the same time look to God to change their hearts, or to raise up others who might be more favourable. Again the New Testament gives us an example. In Hebrews we read: *"Know that our brother Timotheus is set at liberty"* ( Hebrews 13:23). That is, the authorities had moved in his case, and we can pray about these things. It was needful for the testimony that Timothy should be set at liberty. Paul remained bound, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for us nations. It was no mistake that Paul remained bound. Peter in prison is another instance. Times were changed there. It says that unceasing prayer was made by the assembly to God concerning him, but, while he was set at liberty, there was also the martyrdom of James.

Sometimes God allows repressive conditions to continue because He would secure the features that marked the church in Smyrna where the Lord says: *"I know thy tribulation and thy poverty"* and tells them that they will have tribulation ten days (Revelation 2:9 & 10). Philadelphia and Smyrna are the only two churches out of the seven addressed in the Revelation where the Lord has nothing to rebuke. We have to take into account that the discipline is all under God's hand and it is allowed by Him. As the book of

Daniel develops, there is much about the king of the north and his disciplinary activities but they are all under divine control and they bring the wise to light. Daniel, of course, is one of them, because he says God had given him "*wisdom and might*" (*Daniel 2:23*).

If God allows a disciplinary power, it is in view of forming those who shall be among the wise, because, while God gives wisdom, we are not ready to receive it until we have been through certain experiences. It is the gift of God but we would not be capable of taking it in, or of appreciating it, unless we were put in certain circumstances. And so, in His disciplinary ways, He places us in circumstances where we feel the need of wisdom and then He gives it. Thus we value it, and become formed by it. If God uses a power for discipline He does not fail to judge and destroy that power when the discipline has done its work. We have seen that in our own day. If we were more intelligent in these things we would be in closer communion with God. We should confidently speak to God in relation to men, to kings, those in dignity and in relation to authorities.

Gerald R. Cowell

*Based on a Bible reading at Croydon 29<sup>th</sup> March 1957*

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**The following is a short extract from the address given on the same occasion:**

I wish to say a word about the epistles to Timothy because there we have the exhortation. "*I testify before God and Christ Jesus, who is about to judge the living and dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom proclaim the word...*" (*2 Timothy 4:1*). Some may have questioned whether what we have been engaged with today is really important for Christians. I can tell you it is most important. Paul bases his exhortation upon it. He is bringing Daniel 7 before us, as well as other passages, when he speaks of His

appearing and His kingdom, and He is bringing that to bear upon us as a lever in our souls to impel us to get on with the work. And what is the work? *“Proclaim the word; be urgent in season and out of season, convict, rebuke, encourage, with all longsuffering and doctrine”* (2 Timothy 4:1-2). By Paul the proclamation was fully made in the presence of Nero.

We are to be urgent in season and out of season in proclaiming the word. It really involves using the sword of the Spirit. We should pray to be more adept in the use of that sword, which is the word of God... You do not need any other weapon. Armies and navies will never settle anything finally because the real conflict is in the minds of men. Once you could bring men to govern themselves by the word of God, everything would be settled. If difficulties arise among the people of God, the moment you can cause the word of God entirely to govern the minds of the saints, there is no more difficulty. Everything depends on that. When the word of God really governs the minds of men on this earth, wars, as we know them, will cease; the conflict will be over... Among the nations we see physical conflicts which achieve nothing as to the solution of good and evil. They achieve things in the ways of God. God is over all in His providential ways. But, in the conflict we are engaged in, the only effective weapon is the sword of the Spirit.

Paul brings all this to bear upon Timothy: *“I testify before God and Christ Jesus, who is about to judge living and dead”*. He is about to judge us.... presently He will cause us to stand before Him. Paul speaks about a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge would give him in that day. We shall not stand before the Lord for penal judgment like the beast and the wicked dead. Thank God for that! But what is not judged now will have to be judged. Before we appear with Him in His kingdom we shall have heard what the righteous Judge has to say. He is about to judge living and dead, and about to appear and introduce His kingdom. It is all this that makes it so urgent that we should get on with the work at the present time. The proclamation of

the word involves the work of the ministry, the work of the Lord, and it involves the conflict, too. It involves the use of the sword of the Spirit, and so Paul says, *“convict, rebuke, encourage, with all long-suffering and doctrine”*. ..

May the Lord help us in all these matters and may He help us rightly to discern the difference between the vision given to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 2 and that given to Daniel himself in chapter 7. What I have been saying about the beasts and their character does not alter at all the truth set out in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision that the authorities that exist are set up by God. Though, in themselves, they are bestial in character according to Daniel 7, yet, in the light of the vision in chapter 2, we have to recognise that God is over the whole matter of government and that He controls them. An understanding of the two visions will help us in our prayers. We shall pray that God may keep them under control and not permit them to display their bestial character. If He does permit it at certain times for disciplinary purposes, that is all part of His ways, but an understanding of these visions will help us to pray to God for restraint, that He may hold them in His hand and use them for good until that time when the kingdom, to which we already belong, will, in the Person of the King, strike the feet of the image and it will disappear from the earth. The days of indirect government on God’s part will be over, and the direct government of God in the hands of Christ will fill the earth.

May God help us in these matters for His name’s sake.

Gerald R. Cowell

Croydon 29<sup>th</sup> March 1957