

**A Selection
of
ADDRESSES
and
PREACHINGS
by
*Mark Lemon***

**Stone Publishing Trust
20 Ormond Crescent, Hampton TW12 2TH**

PREFACE

The Lord took His servant Mark Lemon to be with Himself in June 2019. He had served in ministry and in preaching the Gospel for many years, but although much had been recorded very little had appeared in print. The present volume contains a small selection of his addresses and Gospel preachings drawn from those recordings over the years. They cover a range of topics which the Trustees believe to be of particular value to believers in our Lord Jesus, and to others, at the present time. All have been carefully edited, and sometimes abridged, but not by Mark himself, and the editors have endeavoured to maintain Mark's unique style of presentation.

For over 25 years Mark was the editor of the magazine *Living Water* which included current ministry, articles written years ago often based on his own researches and Christian testimonies both current and from the past. Some material gleaned from these researches as well as incidents from his own life are included in the following ten printed articles selected here for this publication.

May the Lord continue to turn Mark's labours to account in promoting His work among His people, near and far: for there are parts of Africa, Asia, Australasia and the Americas where he is loved and missed by some who knew him only by correspondence.

Quotations from the Bible are generally from the Darby Translation; otherwise from the Authorised Version.

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THE WORK OF GOD

Jesus says to them, My food is that I should do the will of him that has sent me, and that I should finish his work.

John 4:34

Then they who had been scattered abroad through the tribulation that took place on the occasion of Stephen, passed through the country to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one but to Jews alone. But there were certain of them, Cyprians and Cyrenians, who entering into Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, announcing the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus. And the Lord's hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. And the report concerning them reached the ears of the assembly which was in Jerusalem and they sent out Barnabas to go through as far as Antioch: who, having arrived and seeing the grace of God, rejoiced, and exhorted all with purpose of heart to abide with the Lord; for he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith; and a large crowd of people were added to the Lord. And he went away to Tarsus to seek out Saul. And having found him he brought him to Antioch. And so it was with them that for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd: and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Acts 11:19-26

But I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is minister of the assembly which is in Cenchrea; that ye may receive her in the Lord worthily of saints, and that ye may assist her in whatever matter she has need of you; for she also has been a helper of many, and of myself.

Romans 16:1-2

I want to pass on a very simple impression as to the matter of work. There is a great need to be able to identify the work of God and to further it. These three scriptures that we have read show us that process going on. I think every feature that is right we see distinctively in the Lord Jesus. It is good to have that assurance,

because you can rely absolutely on Him. If He did a thing you know that it is right. If He said something you know it is absolutely true because of who He is. And so it is a matter of wisdom that if you want to see how something should be done see first of all how the Lord did it.

He was here as One who was particularly committed to filling out the Father's work. Jesus said of Himself "the Son can do nothing of himself save whatever he sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). Oh, what distinctiveness that gives to everything that Jesus did. We think of His actions here: His works of healing, His speaking. In every one of them, you might say, it was what He saw the Father doing.

In this verse we read Jesus says, "my food is that I should do the will of him that has sent me, and that I should finish his work". The Lord also spoke about working while it was day and the night coming when no one can work (John 9:4). The Lord was One who was pre-eminently a worker. It says, He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). You think of the divine energy which was present in the blessed Son of God here working. And He had one great objective in His work and that was that the Father should be glorified.

It is wonderful that there should be a Man here whose will was so perfectly in accord with the will of His Father, moving here in infinite pleasure to God. I can understand the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight" (2 Peter 1:17). There was never a movement of Jesus that was not in perfect accord with the mind of heaven. There had never been a man like Him before and never been a man like Him since.

He came as One who was able to fulfil all God's will. When you think of the way that Adam had every circumstance to his advantage and the way that he became disobedient so early, you see a tremendous contrast with the Lord Jesus here. Every circumstance, you might say, was against Him: there were those who were opposed, those who spoke against Him, there were those

who worked against Him. The whole scene with its sin and sorrow and the marks of corruption were all alien to Him. And yet in that environment that was so opposed to Him He fulfilled all the Father's will.

And it says here, "My food is that I should do the will of him". You might say, speaking simply, that it was essential to Him to do the Father's will. It is essential to eat if we are going to live. If you do not eat your food you will not live very long. The Lord Jesus was here as seeking the glory of the Father. He says: "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory" – that does not count for much. Then He adds "but he that seeks the glory of him that has sent him, he is true, and unrighteousness is not in him" (John 7:18). The Lord Jesus was here as seeking the Father's glory, the One that had sent Him.

You know, even when we do things for the Lord, we are often tested as to why we do them. But with the Lord Jesus there was never the slightest self-seeking or seeking after His own things, but always seeking the glory of the Father.

In that day to come, every knee is going to bow to Jesus. That is going to be for His glory, I admit. It says, every knee, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings, will bow, to God the Father's glory (Philippians 2:10, 11). Oh, it will be a glorious day. Christ will be acknowledged by every knee bowing to Him. All that have been opposed to Him and stood against the truth and tried to confound His people will have to acknowledge Him. But it is for God the Father's glory.

And so, we see in the Lord Jesus not only perfection of divine service but we see the end in view, which is the Father's praise. In the well-known story in John 4 Jesus said to this woman: The Father seeketh worshippers. She is one, you might say, in whom the Father had begun a work. The Lord went through Samaria, "he must needs pass through Samaria" it says. Why had He needed to go through Samaria? It was because the Father had begun a work with this woman and the Lord Jesus was on the way completing it.

I suppose that the Lord received His guidance from the Father day by day. “He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed” (Isaiah 50:4). When you think of who He was it just leaves you humbled that there were those marks of dependent manhood in Him as seeking the Father’s will as to everything. Of course, you find that others did not necessarily understand it. When the disciples came they “wondered that he spoke with a woman”. They wondered about this matter. Perhaps if they had known about her they would have wondered even more! But what I see is that the Lord was moving on, not according to human wisdom but according to the Father’s direction, seeing what the Father was doing, seeing what the work of God was and furthering it. And who could do it so completely as He could?

That distinction marks the Lord Jesus in His service here! And yet it is something that is for our own encouragement too, because we see that if such a One as He was engaged in this work, how blessed it is that we can be brought in to labour where He has laboured.

He said to the disciples here, “others have laboured, and ye have entered into their labours”. Often in this world, people want to do everything themselves so that they get all the credit. In the way of divine love if we are used in any way at all we are used as entering in to the labours of others, and above all, entering into what God has begun in the first place.

If someone gets converted through the preaching, if someone is helped in any way, then that is not a matter of credit to the one who preached or provided help, it is a matter of giving glory to God who did the work. The Lord Jesus moved ever that there might be glory to the Father, that the Father’s praise might be secured.

So I read of Barnabas because I think he is someone who stands out as having the ability to identify what God is doing and to link on with it. In the first reference to Barnabas we find him taking of his substance and putting it at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:37). Quite a simple matter, in one way! And yet not so simple – he was

seeing what God was doing and he was committed to it. That describes Barnabas.

He had not any thought, it seems, for himself, for his own things. Immediately afterwards we are told about Ananias and Sapphira. They wanted to be thought to be like Barnabas and others but they really wanted to keep a bit for themselves. But Barnabas seems to me to pattern himself after the Lord Jesus and to have taken on something of His spirit in this first reference to him.

And you find Barnabas continues that way. In this passage that we read in Acts we find that Barnabas is sent out from Jerusalem to Antioch where there was obviously a work of God going on. This work of God was a little bit akin to what happened with the woman in John 4 in that it would, according to human reasoning or thinking, be quite unexpected. There were many of the Christians at that time who were “speaking the word to no one but to Jews alone”. They thought salvation was limited to the chosen people and they required adjustment.

But what you have here is a man who could find this work of God going on amongst these Greeks in Antioch, and it says when he saw the grace of God he rejoiced. Not when he saw how many were converted, not when he saw how great was their affection although those things may have been present. Thank God if a number of people get converted. Thank God if they have great affection for Christ. But what Barnabas noticed was the grace of God that could reach out to that woman in John 4 and to these persons in Antioch. And when he saw it he rejoiced.

It is wonderful to get a sense of the grace of God in your own soul. Peter had a sense of the grace of God. C A Coates said that Peter could never have preached if it had not been for the grace that he learned from the Lord Jesus because of his failure. Peter had failed the Lord and denied Him but the Lord had not given him up. He had not come to him and said, ‘Peter, you are no use now’. No, He had appeared to him in resurrection to re-assure him that he was

still to be taken into service. He was still to be a fisher of men. Peter had been called for that task.

God is not put off from what He initially calls us for. He calls you with a service in mind, whoever you are. He has something for you to do. We may be like Jonah, sometimes, and try to avoid doing it. Or we may be like Peter; we have failed grievously in some way. Other things may come in but God is not deflected from what He has called us.

There is work to be done. You are the only person who can do what you have been called for. But the only way you can do it successfully is as learning how to do it from Christ, as learning something of His grace. Peter first learned the grace of God and then he was able to impart it. He was able to give those persons who heard him such an impression of the grace of God that 3000 were converted.

Barnabas sees the grace of God and he rejoices. I think we often perhaps underrate Barnabas. I used to think of him quite superficially as someone who accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey and turned away on the second. That seemed to be the end of Barnabas. But the Spirit of God is rather fuller in what He tells us about Barnabas. He was the man who, when Saul of Tarsus wanted to join himself to the disciples in Jerusalem, brought him along. I think that tells us worlds about Barnabas. He was a man who was prepared to take a risk.

The local assembly in Jerusalem did not believe that Paul had been converted at all. They thought that he wanted to get amongst them to find out who were Christians and haul them off to prison. They did not believe that such a man could be converted or had been converted. But Barnabas was prepared to take the risk of finding out. I think he must have seen Paul – perhaps he had gone to see him at his house. Certainly he found out a bit about his conversion and he was able to tell the saints how Jesus had appeared to Saul of Tarsus in the way (Acts 9:27). Barnabas was a man who started with a knowledge of the grace of God that had met him. He thus

knew that it was possible for Saul to be converted, like the woman in John 4, just like you and me. No matter what our history has been, we know something of the grace of God that has met us. So he started off from the basis that it was perfectly possible that Saul could be a lover of the Lord Jesus and he took the risk, he took him to the apostles. He found out about him and he introduced him to the company. I think it shows Barnabas as a man who could identify the work of God, who was prepared to put himself at risk.

In this passage we have read he went to seek out Saul. When Barnabas was in Antioch he found there was a situation where Saul of Tarsus was needed and he set out to bring him in. If Barnabas had been thinking of himself I suppose he would have continued to try and serve alone in Antioch. But Barnabas was not thinking like that, he was thinking of the good of the company. He was thinking really of the glory of Christ and the glory of the Father. Barnabas said, 'my reputation does not matter, this is something that calls for Saul' and so he went and got him. Barnabas was a man who could identify the work of God and further it.

I think the power for doing this is given to us in verse 24. It says that, "he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith". Full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. I wish I was more filled with the Holy Spirit: I wish I had more faith. Faith counts a tremendous amount.

A man said to me once about someone who was coming along regularly to the preaching, a stranger as we might speak about it. And after the preaching this brother said, 'so and so comes along to the preaching but he does not get any help'. I said to him, 'Well, do you expect him to get any help?' He said, 'No, not really'. And that really was the clue or one of the clues as to why the person was not getting any help.

When we do something for the Lord we have to do it with faith that He is going to act, that the Father is going to operate; otherwise we might as well not bother. Unless we count upon the Father working

in the hearts, unless we count upon the power of the Holy Spirit nothing will be achieved for God's glory.

And so Barnabas served with faith believing that God was going to act. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. Barnabas would realise that when something did happen, if he was an agent in it, he would just rejoice. But that was all he was, an agent; an agent of the blessed Spirit of God. Oh, I wonder if we give enough place to the Spirit of God!

You remember the woman that cried out to the prophet, who said she was in great distress because the creditor had come and she had no money to pay her debts. And the prophet said to her, 'What have you got in the house?' And she said 'I have not got anything in the house, save a pot of oil'. It seems that she had forgotten about the pot of oil or she had discounted it. And very often perhaps we find ourselves – I speak for myself, anyway – we find ourselves doing that with the blessed Spirit of God.

That woman found that the pot of oil gave her power to meet her debt and live on the rest. There is that immense power and resource in the blessed Spirit – in fact it is the only power in which we can do anything for God. Barnabas was a man who was marked as "full of the Holy Spirit and of faith; and a large crowd of people were added to the Lord".

I think it is wonderful to see that persons in Antioch were added to the Lord. It is a great thing to be added to the Lord, not just to be added to a company of Christians. That does not stand us in much stead when trials or difficulties crop up, but to be added to the Lord is an immense stability.

I now refer to Phoebe. "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, ... a helper of many and of myself" says the apostle Paul. I think Phoebe stands out as one who serves in obscurity.

The Lord Jesus shows us the distinctiveness in the eye of heaven in the matter of identifying and filling out and completing the Father's work. Barnabas shows us the power in which it is to be

done. Phoebe would show us the obscurity in which it is conducted – at least, as far as this world goes.

We would never have known anything about Phoebe if it had not been for this letter to the Romans. She served the saints in the place where she was, perhaps in other places, too. The Spirit of God records her as being a “helper of many, and of myself”.

It is a great thing to serve with the objective of knowing that the time of reward is beyond us. “Thy Father who sees in secret will reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:18). The time for reward, as the time for Christ’s reward in its fulness, is beyond. The reason that the time for our reward is later is because the time for His reward is later. The Father cannot reward the faithful saint until the Son has entered into the fulness of His reward. It just would not be right, would it?

Phoebe was one who was content to serve in obscurity and just be described as a helper. I think it is wonderful to be a helper, someone who can just help on something that God is doing. When you think of the Lord Jesus as labouring in that regard, when you think of the power of the Holy Spirit as operating towards the same end, it gives a wonderful distinction to what might appear just to be obscure and hidden things.

And so Phoebe is a helper and she is a helper of the apostle Paul. You might have wondered about that. You might say, surely the apostle Paul did not need help from these people. But he did, great as he was, gifted as he was, committed to the Lord as he was – I suppose he was one who was outstandingly committed, prepared to spend and be utterly spent (2 Corinthians 12:15). Perhaps that was something that he had seen first of all in Barnabas, the one who could lay his resources at the apostles’ feet. Yet Paul, with all his committal and resource, needed persons who were helpers – and Phoebe was a helper of many.

Years ago I remember a brother saying something about this scripture. The way he put it was that when somebody came in and needed a cup of tea, Phoebe would have provided it. She was

prepared to do anything just to further the work of God, to help on what God was doing and she was not looking for any credit for herself.

Of course, God marks out such actions. I think the Spirit of God just gives us this comment so that we might be aware that whatever is done in that simple, unassuming way to further the work of God is recorded in heaven.

God has His books, you know. Perhaps we think of them just as the book of life and some of the other books that we are told about. But God records the labours that are undertaken by His people here as taking character from Christ and with the same objective as Jesus had, that the Father might be glorified.

I remember once in the office being able to speak to a colleague about her soul. I found later that five other Christians in the office had also spoken to her. I then went back to my office and I knelt down and I thanked the Lord for allowing me to have part in something that He was doing. I think Phoebe sets out something of that character: she was a helper of many. She took character from Christ, she wanted His to be the glory. She wanted His Father to have the place of honour and glory. She was not thinking of herself; she was thinking of just furthering the work of God.

We need to be on the lookout for God's work. Barnabas, I suppose, was like that. He was looking for the operations of the grace of God. I think Phoebe would not just have waited for people to come to her; she would have sought to meet needs that she saw. She would not have waited for somebody to ask for help. I think the idea of "helper of many" means that she sought out what she could do for them. And she was commended on that basis.

Well, those were just the simple thoughts that I had for this occasion. We see distinctively in the Lord Jesus how He sought the Father's glory. It is blessedly true that we are able to have our part in the work of God. "Others have laboured, and ye have entered into their labours". May we be helped to do so for His name's sake.

Address at Yeovil on 17 April 1981

THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE LORD JESUS

Then I said, Lo, I come (in the roll of the book it is written of me) to do, O God, thy will.

Hebrews 10:7

The kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hid in the field, which a man having found has hid, and for the joy of it goes and sells all whatever he has, and buys that field.

Matthew 13:44

But the following night the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good courage; for as thou hast testified the things concerning me at Jerusalem, so thou must bear witness at Rome also.

Acts 23:11

I want to say something about the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus. I think it's a very wonderful thing that we can rely on the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus through everything. We live in a world that's marked by very great unfaithfulness, in business matters, in its political systems, in its systems of justice and unfaithfulness in its ordinary relationships. I suppose we live in a day of almost unparalleled unfaithfulness in relation to what I might call the Christian profession. Over against all that the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus shines out in all its blessedness and perfection. There's nothing like it! I want to use these scriptures today to speak about it in three connections: first of all His faithfulness to God, and I believe that would lead us to worship; then His faithfulness to the assembly or to the church, and I believe that would lead us to committal; and finally His faithfulness to the individual saint that I believe would lead us to confidence, confidence in One who is faithful and changes never.

I read this little verse in Hebrew 10 because it's a verse that comes from the book of the Psalms and it prophetically speaks of the Lord Jesus. There was a blessed Man who came here and His whole reason of being here was that He came to do the will of

God. He lived by it! He says in John 4 “my meat is to do the will of him that sent me”. He lived by the will of God and He was absolutely faithful to that. He was faithful to the will of God in secret. We are tested about faithfulness in secret when nobody sees us.

When He was twelve and He was in the temple He said to Joseph and Mary who were seeking Him: “wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). What was occupying Him even as a boy of twelve was the Father’s business! The Spirit of God only gives us a brief glimpse of Him in those early years. When He was about thirty and about to begin public service the Father’s voice from heaven said: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I found my delight” (Matthew 3:17). That meant that the Lord Jesus had been faithful in secret all those thirty years. There was nothing at all spectacular when He was working in the carpenter’s shop, going about His ordinary matters, but the Lord was faithful to God in all things.

Before He entered into His public ministry after His baptism He went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. There He was tempted with every kind of temptation that Satan could devise. He was tempted on the ground of human need. The Lord had been fasting forty days and He was hungry. Satan came to Him with the suggestion that He make these stones bread. Do you not think the Lord could have done that? Of course He could have made those stones bread. He had the power but what was His reply: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that goes out through God’s mouth” (Matthew 4:4). Even in relation to human need He was faithful to God. Satan then took Him to the pinnacle of the temple and suggested that He cast himself down, a temptation of human display. How it finds us out sometimes! Supposing somebody went to the top of Nelson's Column and jumped down into the square and arrived unharmed at the bottom, what publicity there would be! What an appeal human display has to us! But the Lord was unmoved by it. He remained faithful to the path of the will of God. Satan then came with the temptation

of the kingdoms of the world and their glory. What an appeal to pride! How easily we can become dazzled by the glory of the world! Jesus said later that “the ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing” (John 14:30). He did not turn aside from His faithfulness to God. He began His public ministry as One who had been proved in secret against all the wiles of the enemy.

In going through His ministry how faithful He was to God, every day receiving direction from the Father. “He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed” (Isaiah 50:4). What instructions those were when He was sent to sit at Sychar’s well and meet that woman. The Lord says “my meat is to do the will of him that sent me” (John 4:34). He speaks of finishing the Father’s work. The Father had begun a work in that woman and it needed to be completed. The Lord Jesus received directions day by day. There was never the slightest deviation in His pathway from the will of God. ‘He wakeneth mine ear morning by morning’.

Later on we come perhaps to the greatest test of His faithfulness at the garden of Gethsemane, with the whole weight of what it was for Him to offer Himself spotless to God and to be made sin and to have God’s judgment poured upon His holy head. That came home to Jesus in all its awfulness at the garden of Gethsemane. Our hearts can hardly comprehend the awfulness of all that the Lord Jesus freshly committed Himself to there for the will of God. He said “not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42). His faithfulness in everything was seen even when He was surrounded by the most appalling unfaithfulness, the treachery of Judas, the disciples fleeing. Indeed, every man at that scene was wrong and one Man alone was right, in absolute faithfulness to God’s will so that God’s heart might be known in grace. God was towards man in all His love and grace. But to make it known it was necessary that Jesus went that way. Wonderful faithfulness of Jesus! When He comes in His ascended glory He is still marked by faithfulness. He is waiting the Father’s time when He comes to call all the church to be with Him. There

will come a moment when the word will be given and the Lord Jesus will come with an assembling shout and call every one of His own to be with Him forever. In the meantime in faithfulness to the divine timing He waits that word. His faithfulness is even seen when He gives up the kingdom to Him that is God and Father that God might be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Think of that. He as Lord is given that kingdom and then He gives it up in faithfulness to God.

When we think about the faithfulness of Jesus it sets Him very high in our estimation. We may be caught out by unfaithfulness in secret, we may be caught out by temptation, we may be caught out by all sorts of things. He never deviated whatever it cost Him. As we contemplate Him I think it is to promote worship! We see Him as the one Man who is supreme above all others. Yes, you can find faithful men in scripture. You can find faithful persons right down to our day. Paul says, “these things entrust to faithful men” (2 Timothy 2:2). It assumes that such faithfulness comes right down to the end of the dispensation, but when I look at the faithfulness of Jesus He transcended them all. Our blessing depended on His faithfulness; God’s glory depended on his faithfulness. His faithfulness to God sets Him above every other and calls our hearts to be bowed in worship and praise to that Man. It is intended to preserve us from being dazzled by other men however great.

I read in Matthew because it speaks of His faithfulness to the church. Let me tell you what I understand by this parable. The scripture says: “The kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hid in a field, which a man having found has hid, and for the joy of it goes and sells all whatever he has and buys the field”. I think it looks simply at the way that the Lord came into this scene as lowly Man and as He looked about Him He found that there was a treasure implanted by God. There were persons whom He called to Him who became His apostles, persons who came to Him in various ways. As a result such people came to light as a treasure hidden in this world. A centurion came to the Lord to beseech

Him to heal his bondman. He said that he was not worthy that Jesus should come into his house but said in faith “Speak the word and my servant shall be healed” (Matthew 8:8). The Lord wondered as part of this treasure came to light in the centurion. The Lord Jesus found this treasure, He brought it to light and He rejoiced in it because it was the Father’s work. Having found it he hid it again. This parable of course is about the kingdom of the heavens, but I don’t hesitate to apply it today to the assembly because that is where the activity and power of the kingdom is known today. The Lord having found the treasure hid it again. The church isn’t for display yet. It is hid in the world. The public idea of course is that the church is for display but that can’t really be right. It wouldn’t morally be possible for the church to be displayed in this scene because the Lord Jesus is still in rejection. What kind of wife would it be who was pleased to have a great position in a royal court and yet her husband was imprisoned by the very same sovereign? Jesus is cast out, He is despised and He is rejected. He is glorified in heaven but not as far as this world is concerned. That time will come but it is not yet the time for display.

The church will be displayed in all its blessedness – wonderful moment – when He is publicly honoured. In the very scene where He is dishonoured He will be given honour and glory. The church still remains His treasure and as a result He is absolutely committed to it. It says here “for the joy of it sells whatever he had and buys that field”. In giving His life He bought the field and in that field right down to our own day, right down to the coming of the Lord, this treasure is hid. Because in the eye of heaven it is a very real treasure the Lord Jesus is absolutely committed to it. If you think of His faithfulness as soon as He was received up in glory what was His first thought? It was that the Holy Spirit should come to dwell with those that He had left down here. Sometimes you find people get into highly exalted positions and they forget all about their background or their friends that they used to have. But Jesus is not at all like that! When He went up

into glory His thought was for those that had left down here. It is a wonderful feature of the Lord's faithfulness that the Holy Spirit is here in the assembly.

He too is faithful to individual companies. Think of the lazy, decadent, self-satisfied church where Christ was outside. Was the Lord saying 'I'll leave them to it?' No, He comes nearer to Laodicea than any of the others. "I stand at the door, and knock" (Revelation 3:20). Laodicea was marked by gross unfaithfulness, having lost the Lord really and having no sense of what they've lost. That was the tragedy of Laodicea. "If we are unfaithful, he abides faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13). We see a much happier example of it in Acts 9 where the assemblies in Judea were in trouble because of Saul of Tarsus who was going around persecuting and casting people into prison, compelling Christians to blaspheme. Do you think the Lord wasn't taking account of that? Yes, and He was going to meet it in His own time and His own way. Jesus counters that by completely turning Saul from a man who was a persecutor, and an insolent and overbearing man, to become an elect vessel to Him. But it says "the assemblies throughout the whole of Judea had peace being edified ... and were increased through the comfort of the Holy Spirit." The Lord on high acted to remove that which was causing difficulty to those assemblies in Judea. He was taking account and He still is! He is not just letting things go on as if He had no interest in the matter. He is still committed absolutely to His own, to the treasure that is here. And that's why I think it leads to our committal. If the Lord is committed like that what is to be my position? My position is that I must be committed to this treasure in the same way as He is. He is committed to maintain everything that He has left down here, and He is committed to that absolutely. You and I can commit ourselves to that with absolute confidence because the treasure is going to go through. There is going to be that for the pleasure of the Lord right down to the moment of the rapture. I base that statement on what it says in Revelation "the Spirit and the bride say come" (Revelation 22:17). There are going to be

persons who answer to that character of the bride and who can be at one with the voice of the Spirit to say “come” to the Lord Jesus right down to the end. I pray to God that I may be among them! I think we all need to pray that because it is only in dependence that that kind of spirit that answers to Christ can ever be maintained. But it’s a very great encouragement to me to see that scripture envisages that line of things going right on to the end.

Another evidence of His committal is when He comes at the rapture to call all His own to be with Him. When you look around you find that churches, chapels, companies of one kind or other are in a situation of ruin. The church which began in Acts as one whole has divided and separated for one reason or another. When the Lord comes in His faithfulness He will come with an assembling shout – a great wonderful call that will unite everyone of that vast company that is His own and call them all to be with Him forever. His faithfulness is unchanged. Our lack of faithfulness may have caused all kinds of problems, but His faithfulness to His own is absolutely unchanged. I know that when He comes at the rapture others will be called as well and that it will include Old Testament saints. But the way that scripture presents the rapture very largely is that it is the calling of the assembly to be with Him forever. The great bridegroom's voice that affected believers so many years ago was the call: “Behold the bridegroom” (Matthew 25:6). The Lord Jesus comes to call His bride to be with him forever. What a treasure hidden in this scene but very precious to Christ! The Lord is committed to it. You and I should be committed as well.

I read in Acts because you get there the Lord’s faithfulness to an individual who was experiencing a sad and difficult period in his life. Paul, after years of devoted service for the Lord Jesus, had gone up to Jerusalem; it is questionable if it was the Lord’s mind that he should go there. Beforehand in one place disciples had said to him by the Holy Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. In another place Agabus came and prophesied about what would happen to Paul when he went to Jerusalem. Agabus had all the

credentials of a prophet. He had witnessed in Antioch about a famine that actually came to pass. In the Old Testament you find the credentials for a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-22). Agabus was an authenticated prophet but Paul still pressed on saying he was ready to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

I heard somebody once say about Paul that he loved his own people to the point of weakness. He so longed to cause them to be turned in their hearts to the Lord that he loved them even to the point of weakness. Sometimes that happens to us: we can get so occupied with something that in fact it leads us out of the way in which the Lord would have us. David loved Absalom to the point of weakness and it caused a good deal of problems in David's kingdom.

After being taken into custody Paul also seemed to rely on human wisdom and cleverness when he appeared before a crowd of persons, some who were Pharisees and others Sadducees. There he doesn't rely upon the Lord's support and faithfulness. He said: "I am a Pharisee, son of Pharisees" and of course caused a kind of division amongst those accusing him. The Lord was not glorified in this situation.

I say these things, not to belittle Paul, but to show how the Lord in His care deals with His imprisoned apostle who was passing through difficult days. The Lord was not deterred by these strange events. The scripture says the following night the Lord in His faithfulness stood by Paul and said "be of good courage!" Paul later would find the Lord stood with him in other circumstances when he stood before Nero. Paul there says 'all forsook me but the Lord stood by me and gave me power'. We too need to count on the Lord's faithfulness in all situations. The Psalmist says 'the Lord is my helper and I will not be moved'.

When the Lord intervened to protect Paul whom did He use? The Lord used a boy who heard about the plot to kill Paul. When He works for us in His faithfulness He can use something small and

insignificant to bring home to our hearts the way He works. That may be very different from what we imagine He ought to do!

Jeremiah had a wonderful sense of the Lord's personal faithfulness. Not so long ago I was very intrigued to see that in the whole of Jeremiah you never find a circumstance where the people took any notice of what he had to say. Sometimes they said they would do what Jeremiah said, but they went and did something different. Jeremiah was a man who for around 40 years had to face the fact that nobody took any notice of him. I've wondered sometimes what kept Jeremiah going in those circumstances but I think I found the verse in Lamentations which gives us the clue. It says: "It is of Jehovah's loving kindness we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not; they are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23). Jeremiah would have proved the Lord's faithfulness and compassion new every morning. You and I can find like Jeremiah that the Lord's compassions are new every morning. I believe that the faithfulness of Christ to His own leads us to confidence in Him. As the scripture says "He is faithful who has promised" and "I will not leave thee neither will I forsake thee" (Hebrews 10:23; 12:6).

His faithfulness that is above that of every other man should lead us to worship. His faithfulness to His church should lead us to committal to what is of church character here, and His faithfulness to us as individuals while here should lead us to confidence in the blessed One who will never let us down.

Address at Bromley on 27 April 1991

HOW PERSONS ARE MAINTAINED

At that time, Jesus answering said, I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for thus it has been well-pleasing in thy sight. All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son but the Father, nor does anyone know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son may be pleased to reveal him. Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:25-30

And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. Now he had neither washed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace. And as soon as Jerusalem came to meet the king, the king said to him, Why didst thou not go with me, Mephibosheth? And he said, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me; for thy servant said, I will saddle me the ass, and ride thereon, and go with the king; for thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant to my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God; do therefore what is good in thy sight. For all my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king; and thou didst set thy servant among them that eat at thine own table. What further right therefore have I? and for what should I cry any more to the king? And the king said to him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. And Mephibosheth said to the king, Let him even take all, since my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house.

2 Samuel 19:24-30

Ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the saints for service

1 Corinthians 16:15

I want to say something today about the way that persons are maintained in days of difficulty and trial. I do not think that anybody would doubt that the day we are actually in is an evil day. It has been like that always. It is very noticeable that although scripture tells us certain things about the last days, it also seems to show that those last days began from Pentecost. I think that is true because the Lord Himself and the apostles never speak of the coming of the Lord as though it was going to be a very distant event. They always speak of it as being something that was going to happen in their own lifetimes, something they were expecting and looking out for. And so, in one sense, the last days began from the time of Pentecost and have gone on until now.

But I think that it is true to say too that the day we are in is a day that is marked by a great deal of evil, a great deal of difficulty, a great deal of confusion even amongst Christians. Perhaps even a certain amount of confusion in our own hearts and thoughts.

I have just read the scriptures because they speak of days like that and they show us perhaps some of the things that would help to keep us.

I refer first of all to the Lord Himself.

The time that Matthew is talking about is a very unusual one in the gospel. The section where we read really begins in verse 20, and it says there that the Lord Jesus began to reproach the cities in which most of His works of power had taken place because they had not repented.

It was a day when, you might say, the prophetic word applied to the Lord that He had spent His strength for nought and in vain (Isaiah 49:4). He had laboured, He had served, He had wrought miracles and the result in these places was very, very small. And in those circumstances He turns to the Father.

It says, "Jesus answering said, I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth". What it conveys to me and what I would like to convey simply to you is that the Lord was absolutely restful in whatever pleased the Father; He had a resource in the Father,

and whatever the outward circumstances His resource in the Father was absolute and perfect.

And so He turns to the Father and He says, “I praise thee, Father”. You might say He rejoiced in the Father’s will. If it was the Father’s will that certain things should be hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes, then as far as the Lord was concerned that was perfect and He was absolutely restful in the Father’s will. He was restful in the place that He had in the Father’s affections.

John begins his gospel by showing us that the Lord was in the bosom of the Father, absolutely restful in the Father’s affections. That was, if you like, the place to which the Lord resorted and He was delighting just in the Father’s will.

The Lord here did not come to serve any end of His own. We sometimes perhaps think of the Lord as coming to secure ends of His own, but it is not quite how scripture presents it. He came to secure everything for the Father and the Father has given Him very great things as a result. The Lord came with the object of doing the Father’s will. It was His meat to do the will of Him that had sent Him (John 4:34). He said He must work the works of Him that had sent Him while it was day (John 9:4).

The whole reason for His being here was that He should work the Father’s work and do the Father’s will. He was absolutely restful in the will of the Father and in the place that He had in the Father’s affections. That was the secret, you know, of His restfulness in all things.

When a blind beggar might cry out to Him, the Lord Jesus would stand still. There He was, on the way up to Jerusalem. You might have thought it was so important for Him to get there but, no, He would stand still. The secret of the Lord’s restfulness was that He knew that there was time for everything that the Father had planned, and He was perfectly at home with that will, perfectly at home in His conscious relationship with the Father as knowing that that was a relationship of untrammelled affection.

When the Lord turns to the Father here in these circumstances where, according to human reckoning, everything had failed, He was giving an example to us of how we should be when we feel in the same kind of way.

Perhaps we feel that everything is ruined. Perhaps we feel that everything is not worth it. Where are we to find a resource? We are to find a resource in the Father and in the Father's affections. It almost takes my breath away at times when I think of the place that we have in the Father's affections. This passage goes on to speak of the way that the Lord has come to reveal the Father. You see, He has a place in the Father's affections, but the wonderful thing about it is that He is really inviting persons to come to Him that they might share that place in the Father's affections.

The Lord Jesus never had anything less in mind for His own than that we should be brought into the full, wonderful favour of sonship. You can understand how the Lord was in that favour; He was the only begotten Son. He was the One who is described as, "this is my beloved Son, ... hear him" (Matthew 17:5). He was the One who, you might say, was entitled to the Father's affection because of who He was.

He was entitled to the Father's affection because in everything He pleased the Father. There was never a movement of the Lord Jesus that did not please the Father. But the wonderful thoughts of divine love are that you and I come to know that same blessed affection as rested on Christ and rests on Him still, and that we come into that same favour. We are taken into favour in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6). If it depended on me I would not be in favour for a minute. If it depended on you it would be likewise. But it does not depend upon us: we are taken into favour in the Beloved.

Now this scripture is often used in the context of the glad tidings and I do not object to that at all; I have used it myself. But what the Lord is actually doing is He is inviting persons to come to Him that they might come into the privilege of sonship, that they might come to know the Father. And therefore, as He had a resource in

the Father, so you and I are to have a resource in the Father, a resource in knowing the Father's absolute, settled affection, knowing the place that the Father occupies and the place that we have before Him as in Christ.

Everything is settled up there, you know. Everything is absolutely firm, everything is going through exactly according to God's mind. Everything goes on – I think it is Mr Coates who wrote a poem, perhaps the one he wrote when he was 16, I may be wrong about that, but he used some words like the peace in heaven is constant. And there it is. Everything is firm in heaven. Everything is settled. There is no emergency up there.

The Lord retreated, if you like, into that sphere of affection and love and settled order, and He is actually saying here that that is the place of His own. That is the place that the Father intends that we should be brought into. The Father has nothing less in mind than that we should be before Him as clothed in the worth of Christ, And so in the way that the Lord here turned to the Father and just rejoiced in His will, rejoiced in what He was doing, rejoiced in what pleased Him – so you and I have exactly the same resource: to turn to the Father, to find there that His love is absolutely settled, to find there that everything is going according to His plan, that nothing is out of order, that nothing is lost that He has intended to gain, that there are certain things which in His wisdom have pleased Him; the Lord was pleased in what had pleased the Father and you and I can be quite restful about it.

It seems to me that in a day of great confusion the Lord just turned to the Father, and He would remind us that we have exactly the same privilege and resource to turn to the Father, to rejoice in the Father's will and to rejoice that everything is secured and established in Christ for our blessing there.

It is a most wonderful thing to lay hold of the great things that God has done. Because what God does He does for ever. It is not altered by my thoughts or anything that I may do, it cannot be. There is that which has pleased the Father and which He has done, and as a

result of His mighty love we have been brought into a place of favour and blessing.

Taken into favour in Christ! Nothing can alter that. Christ has that place in heaven and what a secure and perfect place it is. We are blessed in Him and as a result we have this resource just as the Lord did. The Lord had it in its perfection and was perfectly restful. I think we can find rest of soul, rest as just taking on what the Lord did here.

He “answered”. It shows, I think, a Man in communion. He was answering to the Father. It may bear another view, too, that it was an answer to the sort of questions and concerns that were in the hearts of the disciples. But either way I think it shows just what a wonderful peace there was always with the Lord as pursuing the Father’s will. And that peace and that joy and restfulness are open to you and me: we are called into the position of sons. We are blessed as sons. The Father’s favour is absolutely towards us. What a resource, to be able just to get into the things of God in this way.

There was a man called Asaph who wrote a Psalm (73). That psalm speaks about what troubled him when he looked around and saw wicked men prospering and righteous persons going to the wall. It troubled him as it troubles many persons. And perhaps rightly so up to a point! But then what happened? He “went into the sanctuaries of God” and he says, “then understood I their end”. He saw everything from God’s point of view. He got into the sanctuary. Where is the sanctuary for you and me? It is where Christ is. There, seated on the Father’s throne, the Father’s affections resting on Him and those same affections flowing out towards you and me. It is the believer’s resource in a dark day. However dark the day down here, however broken – however much we may have contributed even to the brokenness – nothing alters what is going on in heaven. The peace of heaven is constant. Why? Because Christ has made it, and He is seated there at the right hand of the greatness on high. Nothing can touch Him and everything is established and settled before Him.

I read in Samuel because here you find another case of somebody preserved in a dark day. I think what comes out typically in this scripture is that we are preserved as occupied with Christ.

One of the things that struck me recently was that how extraordinary it was that, when everybody else was wrong, Mephibosheth was preserved. Ziba was wrong. Ziba had made off with Mephibosheth's property in an earlier chapter and given it to King David as though it was his own, and had slandered Mephibosheth. He had said that Mephibosheth was hoping to get the kingdom and that the house of Israel would turn to the house of his father Saul and would put him on the throne. Terrible slander! As a result David had fallen for that and he had promised Ziba all Mephibosheth's property.

Here you find David coming back in peace and alas, alas he is still wrong in relation to Mephibosheth. Everybody, you see, that Mephibosheth might have trusted and relied upon was wrong and yet Mephibosheth is preserved.

I think there are two things that are the secret to it. One was that he was, typically, occupied with Christ and Christ's glory. That superseded everything else for him. The other was that he had a wonderful and deep sense of mercy. I want to speak about the sense of mercy first.

Mephibosheth realised that he was nothing. David had taken him and put him at his own table. Yes, he had given him a place amongst the king's sons. He had given him that place of privilege and blessing, and Mephibosheth knew that he was not worthy of it. He knew that the only reason he had been given it was because David had shown the mercy and kindness of God. In fact, in an earlier chapter, David was asking whether there was anybody of the household of Saul to whom he could show the kindness of God to for Jonathan's sake.

David had been a much greater man at that point. But Mephibosheth had a tremendous sense of divine mercy. I think we

sometimes ought to pray – I feel for myself anyway – that perhaps I ought to pray that I might have a greater sense of mercy.

It was mercy that saw Paul through, you know. How often he says, “Mercy was shewn me”. He had a tremendous sense of divine mercy. In fact, the more he went on in his course the more he became conscious that he was little or nothing. You see that in his references to himself. In one of the early references he talks about not being worthy to be an apostle. And probably the last reference we have in scripture of Paul referring to what he was he says he is the chief of sinners. Over the years he had taken a downward track as it were as to his opinion about himself. What had happened? All that way he had a greater and greater sense of the mighty mercy of God that had met him, mercy made known through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Himself said, “Blessed the merciful, for they shall find mercy” (Matthew 5:7). What that conveys to me is that every one of us stands in need of mercy at some time. The more sense we have of the mercy of God towards us the more we shall be merciful in relation to others: I am quite convinced about that. The more we shall be preserved from any taking of high ground. Because what are we? As David could say elsewhere, “who am I, and what is my people that we should be able to offer willingly after this manner?” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

What are we? What are any of us? Nothing but the objects of divine mercy! Where would we be if it had not been that God in His mighty mercy had taken account of us and sent His Son to save us.

Where would we be even as Christians? What would our lives be if it was not for the mercy of God? I like what James Montgomery wrote in his poem:

How will I meet those eyes?
Mine eyes on Him I'll cast
I'll own myself the Saviour's prize
Mercy from first to last.

Absolute mercy. Look back on your life as a Christian. Look back on your life just since you came to the Lord. Never mind the mercy that was shown to you in saving you at all, but just look back on your Christian course. Has it not been marked by mercy? Has God given any one of us what we deserve? I thank God He has not given me what I deserve. No, there has been mercy, mercy all the way.

When we get to glory what will happen? Everybody there, everybody in heaven, will have a sense of divine mercy. That will be one of the things that the judgment seat of Christ will give us. And heaven's praise, that great song that will arise to the Lord, to God, the great song that will arise at that time – a great deal of it will spring from the sense of mercy which we have been given at the judgment seat of Christ. Everybody will be there as owning that they could never have got there on their own.

Winston Churchill, when he was invited once to address the Senate of the United States, started by telling them that his mother was an American and he thanked them for their invitation to address them, saying that if his mother had been an Englishwoman and his father had been an American he might have got there on his own! Of course they cheered and clapped and all the rest of it. But, you know, when we get to heaven what will it be? Everyone will be there with a deep and abiding and eternal sense of the divine mercy which has brought us there. And it will lead to praise.

But a sense of mercy while we are down here is what Mephibosheth had and it preserved him. He had a sense of his own utter unworthiness. He was not going to go claiming his rights. He was not going to go around saying, 'That land was mine, or that Ziba has done this or that and so I should have it back'. No, he had a sense that he was utterly unworthy and he was preserved as a result.

But the other thing that preserved him was that he had a sense of the wonderful greatness of Christ. Now, I want to try and explain this because you have to think of David not now in relation to his

failure, sad as it was, but we have to think of David as a type: in his absence while Absalom was in rebellion, we have to think of it as a little picture – which I believe it is – of the present time when the Lord Jesus is away, when He is cast out and the world lies in the wicked one (1 John 5:19).

And how is a believer to be preserved in an evil day when the world lies in the wicked one? We are to be preserved by continual occupation with Christ. There is no One else worthy of our occupation anyway. But that is the only way in which we will be preserved.

And that is exactly what came out with Mephibosheth. He longed for David to return. If you just will follow the picture, it is like us. Do we long for Christ to return? Do we long for the Lord Jesus to come? I will tell you what will happen if you long for Christ's return. It will have a moral effect in your being. One of the New Testament epistles tells us, I think it is John, "everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

I will give you a little practical example of that. It is a true story about a sister – I could tell you her name but I will not. When she was young, she was brought up in a household where her father was not the Lord's and her mother was. Her mother used to take her along to meetings and the preaching and so forth. Her father used to take her along to theatres and entertainments and all that sort of thing. And although she was the Lord's you can imagine as a young girl which one she preferred. One day her father said he was going to take her to some show in a few days' time. She told her mother this with great excitement. Her mother said to her, 'Well, if the Lord came while you were there, what would you think about that? What would He think about it?' She said she went to that show with her father but she did not enjoy it a bit, she was thinking all the time, perhaps the Lord will come.

You know, everyone who has that hope in Him purifies himself. A very real, a very practical thing! Mephibosheth was a man who was separate from the course of the world. It comes out in the figure:

he did not wash his feet or his clothes or trim his beard. He would have been a right sight, would he not? That is how sometimes people think of believers, do they not?

I heard of somebody who was in the NCCs (Non Combatant Corps). Some regular soldiers used to poke fun at people who were in the NCCs. One day one of these Christian men was sent to carry a message somewhere to a colonel. The colonel offered him cigarettes. He said, 'No sir, I do not smoke'. So he offered him a drink. He said, 'I do not drink'. So he asked him, 'Do you eat grass?' And he said, 'No, I do not eat grass'. The colonel said 'you are fit for neither man nor beast'. That is just a simple illustration of the way that people in the world sometimes think.

That is how they would have thought about Mephibosheth. Does it not give the lie, of course, to what Ziba said, that he was seeking the kingdom? Here was this man in mourning, if you like, mourning the absence of David. Why? In type he looked out for the coming of Christ. There is nothing that so holds the believer as to look out for the coming of the Lord. That is what we have been converted for.

Paul writing to the Thessalonians said, "ye turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens" (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10). That is the hope of the believer. It transforms everything here. The Lord is the One who is coming.

He is the One who has the right to reign. You see, when you look at David here and see what a failure he was even as God's anointed king, you realise how different it is when Jesus comes to reign. He is the One who has the right to reign and to reign properly, and to have everything under His sway, as Isaiah tells it, "a king shall reign in righteousness" (Isaiah 32:1). That is Jesus, He is the only One who will actually do it.

There have been kings like David and Solomon and they were truly appointed of God, but they did not reign the way that Christ will. There will be an absolute perfection in the reign of Christ. As far as Mephibosheth was concerned, the fact that David was back in

the kingdom was enough for him. He was like one who values Christ above everything and he rejoices in the Lord.

I think that we need to pray that the Spirit might so enlarge Christ and His perfections, the greatness of who He is and what He has done and His wonderful love that we might be the more looking out for Him.

This world is full of tired things and useless things. When Christ comes they will all show up for the empty things that they are. Isaiah talks about the coming of the Lord, and he says every high mountain will be brought low and then he talks about works of art and other things that will be done away (Isaiah 2:12-19). Yes, the things that seem so important and so beautiful, they will not show up very much in relation to Christ. When He comes He will outshine them all.

The thing with Mephibosheth was that the true king outshone them all even in his heart down here. Even in this situation where, you might say, he should have been able to rely on David, he should have been able to rely on Ziba his servant – it turned out he could not rely on either of them. But did that alter Mephibosheth? No, he knew that his portion was elsewhere.

In the eye of God someone looking out for the coming of Christ is of the utmost importance. God does not forget the acts of faithfulness. In thinking about people who were right when others were wrong, I nearly read about Urijah the Hittite. He was another man who was betrayed by David and Joab, the very persons he ought to have been able to trust. And yet he himself was kept right. And you say, well, he just got murdered in the end. But God shows that He takes account of these things. At the end of Samuel the Spirit of God includes Uriah the Hittite and when the Spirit caused to be penned the genealogy of Christ and you come to Solomon in Matthew's gospel, what does it say? "Solomon, of her that had been the wife of Urias".

What is the Spirit of God conveying in those things? That He has not forgotten that man's faithfulness. He has not forgotten what

that man was. We will see him in glory and we will see that he gets his recognition in glory. That is what the Lord Jesus says. He says, “I come quickly, and my reward with me, to render to every one as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12).

Yes, very solemn to think of, to reward every one as their work shall be. Yes, God takes account of one person looking out for Christ, one person occupied with Christ. One person who just sees Jesus alone as those disciples did on the holy mountain. They opened their eyes and they saw no one but Jesus alone. They had seen Moses and Elias but those persons had disappeared. All they had before them was Jesus alone.

Week by week we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. There are many things that the Supper does for us, many things that it leads into in the way of privilege. But it also does something else. Every time it is to focus our affections on One who loved us and gave Himself for us, to make us see that One in all His blessedness and glory and the way that His love took Him and the way that His love is towards us still. That is why the Lord said, “As often as ye do this”.

I heard a Christian once say, ‘Well, I go to communion once a month. That is enough for me!’ I felt very sad for him! Week by week as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper it is to bring home to our souls the greatness of the love of Christ and how superior He is to everyone. He has a claim on our affections and our loyalties that no one else has.

That leads us to be as Mephibosheth was: he was out of gear altogether with the things of Absalom’s court and so on. There was this unwashed man with his beard untrimmed and so forth – out of gear altogether with Absalom’s court.

One of the things that we need to preserve us in this world is to be self-judged. “Hold aloof”, says the apostle to the Thessalonians, “from every form of wickedness” (1 Thessalonians 5:22). I pass that on to you very simply because I have found that that little verse has been a practical help to me. At times when I have thought of certain things that I might do or not do and so forth; that verse

has come to me, “hold aloof from every form of wickedness”. And I have just stopped and I have cried out to the Lord.

Never be afraid to cry out to Jesus. You might be in the very act of sinning or about to sin. Do not be afraid to cry out to Him. Just as Peter cried out and the Lord was so near to him, wasn't He? Peter was just about to sink in the sea and he cried out to Jesus and the Lord was there and took hold of him (Matthew 14:30, 31). You know, you and I may be in great danger of sinning. Cry out to the Lord Jesus!

One of the things I would say simply to you is, be honest with the Lord. When I was young I used to hear people talk about self-judgment and it scared me. I was scared by the idea. I thought that there are these things I know are wrong but I still want to do them. I was literally afraid to say to God that I knew it was wrong but I still wanted to do it. And yet it is the way of salvation to be quite honest with God. There may be things that we want to do and we feel powerless. The way of salvation is to cry out to the Lord and to be quite honest about what we are doing. To say to Him that we know it is wrong but we still want to do it. In those circumstances the Lord will come in and He will actually change our tastes. He will change what we want to do. Like that lady who liked to go to a show, her taste actually changed because she loved Christ. What pleases you will change. But remember we live in an evil world. Remember, we need to be careful about our walk. We need to be just as Mephibosheth was, apart from the world here which lies in the wicked one.

A lot of the epistles; Ephesians, Colossians and to some extent Thessalonians end up with a series of practical exhortations. When we think of Ephesian truth perhaps we do not think of exhortations – to husbands to love their own wives; we don't perhaps think of the exhortation that Paul makes in Ephesians 5 to walk carefully because the days are evil. When we think of Colossian truth we perhaps do not think of that string of practical exhortations that follow at the end of the epistle. But they are there. And they are there for our preservation.

They are there that we might be preserved here in an evil world as occupied with Christ, as Ephesians puts it, growing up to Him in all things. How comprehensive that is. It is not just growing up to Him in spiritual things; it is growing up to Him in everything. And that is what puts self-judgment in its proper perspective. It is not just that I know this or that is wrong but that Christ is so great and so glorious that I want to grow up to Him. And as occupied with Him I am led to cry out to the Lord to help me to deal with those things which would lead me away from Him.

I added the verse in Corinthians because it speaks there of some people who devoted themselves to the saints for service. A good deal of the trouble we get into, you know, is because we have not enough to do.

Here was the house of Stephanas and they devoted themselves to the saints for service. I think this was a labour of love. Corinth would not have been an easy locality to be in. My wife and I were wondering which locality in scripture we might have liked to have been in, and we came to the conclusion that we would have liked to have been in Philippi. Corinth would not have been an easy one to be in. Yet what is happening there? There are these persons who are devoting themselves to the saints for service.

What have they got? They have an object before them; to serve God's people. Why? The reason is that they are God's people, because they belong to Christ. They love them because they loved Christ. And in serving them they shed abroad something of the love of Christ and demonstrated it practically.

It takes my mind to the parable of the talents. During the time of the Lord's absence those men were given talents according to their ability. I guess that the man who had two talents required just as much effort to make four as the man who had five and made ten, because it was according to their ability. There was no time for resting, either way. And I suspect if the man who had the one talent had used it properly and had made two it would have taken him just as much time as the man who made ten.

What was it to be? Persons were to be occupied in the Lord's work and in His things and serving His people. Oh, you say, where is the reward of that? They are a pretty poor company, these Corinthians. Well, I think you would have found if you had asked Stephanas or his wife or any of the others of his household, they would have said that they were making the best they could of the Christian company and they were making sure they contributed to it. That is another way of preservation; make the best of the saints you have.

Make sure you contribute something to them: they too will contribute something to you. The result is that these persons were preserved even in a dark and difficult locality.

Other people like Gaius were in difficult churches, too, and they were preserved. But these persons devoted themselves to the saints for service. They just followed the pattern of the Lord. What a worker He was.

He is the great One. He came to finish the Father's work. All that Stephanas would have said he was doing was just following along, perhaps very feebly in his view, as devoting himself to the saints for service. May we be preserved and blessed in occupation with Christ and the great things of God and His people here.

Address at Yeovil on 23 September 1995

CHRISTIAN CONFLICT

Then Jesus comes with them to a place called Gethsemane, and says to the disciples, Sit here until I go away and pray yonder. And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and deeply depressed. Then he says to them, My soul is very sorrowful even unto death; remain here and watch with me. And going forward a little he fell upon his face, praying and saying, My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; but not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he comes to the disciples and finds them sleeping, and says to Peter, Thus ye have not been able to watch one hour with me? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is ready, but the flesh weak. Again going away a second time he prayed saying, My Father, if this cannot pass from me unless I drink it, thy will be done.

Matthew 26:36-42

For the rest, brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the might of his strength. Put on the panoply of God, that ye may be able to stand against the artifices of the devil: because our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies. For this reason take to you the panoply of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having accomplished all things, to stand. Stand therefore, having girt about your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace: besides all these, having taken the shield of faith with which ye will be able to quench all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. Have also the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word; praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching unto this very thing with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; and for me in order that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the glad tidings, for which I am an

ambassador bound with a chain, that I may be bold in it as I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6:10-20

But I beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in prayers for me to God; that I may be saved from those that do not believe in Judaea; and that my ministry which I have for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.

Romans 15:30,31

I want with the Lord's help this afternoon to say something about Christian conflict. I want to start by drawing your attention to the conflict that the Lord entered into and the victory that He has won. We sang at the beginning 'His be the Victor's name' and if there is going to be any kind of success for us in the conflict that we encounter as Christians we must be firmly grounded in the greatness and the glory of the victory that Jesus has won. It was a wonderful victory that the Lord Jesus won – it stands for all time. It is not like other triumphs and successes that fade after 100 or 200 years but the victory of Jesus stands timeless; it lasts for time and for eternity. When we come to think about the victory of the Lord Jesus and what actually happened at Calvary we find ourselves very much tested, and so I've turned to this passage that speaks about the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane because I see two things in it. One is that the Lord in the garden faced in His spirit everything that was going to come upon Him at Calvary's cross and the second is that He looked for persons to watch with Him. The disciples weren't able for it – the Lord comes and finds them sleeping, He finds them sleeping several times and He makes this comment that the spirit was ready but the flesh was weak. His desire was that they should watch with Him and when He comes back the first time He says "Ye have not been able to watch one hour with me?" I think it conveys to us that at least in mind and in spirit we should follow the Lord to Gethsemane and just see the perfection of that Holy One there. I believe the Spirit would help us to do it, and one of the reasons that it is so important is that it

will put every other person in their place and it will put Christ in His place as Supreme and beyond all others. That is very important in our Christian walk.

I often think there is some significance in what Paul said to the Corinthians; of all the Christian companies written to in the New Testament they were probably the most carnal and getting the furthest away from the Lord. One of the early grounds of Paul's appeal to them regarding their sectarian character (saying that one was of this person and one was of that person) was to remind them of who had died for them. Paul knew that even the Corinthians would be moved and exercised as a result of thinking of the Lord Jesus as the only One who had died for them. And so in mind and spirit let us seek the Holy Spirit's help that we might just ponder the Lord in Gethsemane.

The gospel writers struggle with how to describe the kind of pressure that came upon His spirit. Matthew tells us that He began to be sorrowful and deeply depressed. We all probably know at times what it is to be sorrowful. Perhaps some know the very dreadful thing of being depressed. The Lord became deeply depressed. I think it brings home to us the pressure that came upon His spirit, a kind of pressure which only He could have borne. I think you can understand that because there were two things that in a very particular way affected Him; the first was (although whether these are in the right order I'm not sure) that He who was absolutely holy was going to be made SIN. It was abhorrent to Him, He was separated from sinners, He was absolutely holy as we were reminded in the scripture in Hebrews, He was sin apart. When He encountered sinful acts and sinful things here, it affected Him in His spirit. He was affected when He saw the power of death as a result of sin. That was one of the reasons the Lord wept at the grave of Lazarus. I've no doubt it shows His affection for Mary and Martha and for Lazarus but it shows something else too. He wept as He saw the power of sin over man. You think of how He was moved with compassion when He touched the bier coming out of Nain and He saw that widow in a way which none other could. He

saw the effect of sin and it burdened Him in His spirit in a way that while we may be sympathetic and feeling about such things we can never feel quite in the same way because He felt it as One who was absolutely holy, One who came from God, One who was without sin. The awfulness of what it was for the Lord Jesus to be made sin – it came upon His spirit in the most terrible kind of way.

I believe the Lord was tested by that to the uttermost as to the Father's will and what do you find? He submits perfectly to the Father's will; He says "My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; but not as *I* will, but as *thou* wilt". Absolute perfection of the Lord. Let me remind you that because of who He was there is a sense in which nothing could have made Him go this way other than that devotion to the Father's will and His love to His own. The Lord could have walked from the garden; there is no power on earth that could have stopped Him. He could have gone back into heaven; these things are mysteries in a way but because of who He was there was no power that could have could have stopped Him from doing anything. He could have swept the world with judgment but because of His committal to the Father's will, because that will to Him was His meat, that will was absolutely paramount and cost what it might He was prepared to go that way. "My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; but not as *I* will, but as *thou* wilt". Tremendous words of commitment, despite all the pressure of being made sin.

The other thing that bore upon Him even more was the fact that because He was going to be made sin, He was going to be forsaken. I suppose we know what it is sometimes when we feel that people have let us down; when we feel that people have betrayed us in some fashion. I've read comments of psychiatrists about the kind of scars that affect young children who have been abandoned by their parents and that sort of thing; these things just give us a little idea. The Lord was forsaken. What that meant to Him is absolutely beyond us. In one of the early Psalms in the first book, David speaking prophetically of the Lord Jesus says, "But thou art he that took me out of the womb; thou didst make me trust, upon my

mother's breasts" (Psalm 22:9). Those words are spoken prophetically of the Lord, they couldn't have actually applied to anyone else. You might say a child naturally leans towards its mother's breast. The Lord did that because the Father made Him, that's the kind of relationship there was between the Lord and the Father. It is something that is beyond our comprehension. Scripture gives us some hints about it and there the Lord was absolutely one with the Father. He never was out of communion with the Father in all His life here up to the point of being at the cross. There was never a moment when He didn't also rely upon the Father. People commented about it at the cross – they said "He trusted upon God; let him save him now if he will have him" (Matthew 27:43). They saw the Lord's dependence, they saw His absolute dependence on the Father and they threw it in His face as an insult and yet it brings home to us just what came upon the Lord's spirit as He went to Gethsemane and there He knew what lay before Him – that He was going to be made sin and He was going to be forsaken.

He knew what was going to come upon Him from His own as well. He knew that they were going to forsake Him. Mr Darby puts it somewhat like this – what do I expect from my friends when I'm in trouble? At least that they should stand by me. What did the disciples do? They left Him and fled. What do I expect from a judge if I stand before him? I expect that he should at least inquire and execute justice. What did Pilate do? He said, "See ye to it". What should I expect from a priest? Well at least that he should plead for weakness. What did those priests do? They accused the Lord. Every man you see was wrong, every one. There was nothing on our side that led the Lord to go this way apart from His own love for us. These things came upon the Lord's spirit and we see Him at Gethsemane, and it says "going forward a little He fell upon His face, praying". The pressure on the Lord I believe was so great we just see something of it, "My soul is very sorrowful even unto death; remain here and watch with me. And going forward a little he fell upon his face, praying and saying, My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me".

Then He comes to the disciples, does anybody watch with Him? No. The Lord had “stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). He moved on in absolute commitment to the Father’s will. This is the One of whom Paul could say: ‘The Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me’. What was happening? Satan was defeated in this garden I believe; he was morally defeated there before Calvary. At Calvary when the Lord Jesus entered into those three hours of darkness and bore God’s wrath and when His blood was shed the whole question of sin was settled before God forever and Satan was defeated (Hebrews 2:14). Absolutely and completely!

That is again why we sang that hymn ‘His be the victor’s name’. Morally the battle was there in the garden and Satan was defeated there and as recorded in Luke’s gospel “When the strong man armed keeps his own house, his goods are in peace; but when the stronger than he coming upon him overcomes him, he takes away his panoply in which he trusted” (Luke 11:21-22). and that’s exactly what has happened to Satan. The Lord Jesus in going that way through death has annulled him who had the might of death and defeated him completely. There was never a defeat like it and although Satan may still seem to be very powerful he knows that he is a defeated foe; he knows that his time is short; he knows that his operations are limited because there is One who has come and who has taken away the armour in which he trusted and is spoiling his goods. You know, every time somebody gets converted some of Satan's goods are spoiled. Every time you resist temptation; every time you find yourself in conflict and yet crying out to the Lord to help you to overcome some temptation or some tendency in yourself; every time that happens, Satan's goods are being spoiled.

What a wonderful thing it is that it is still going on; what a blessed and beautiful thing it is that Satan can’t keep his goods because One who is stronger than he has been proved to be stronger. The Lord Jesus has defeated Satan on the grounds of absolute dependence. How did Satan fall? He wanted to be as God, he

exalted himself and said he'd be like God and that was the secret of his fall. It was the secret of our fall too because that is the way he approached Adam and Eve and offered them that if they could eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would be as God. And they fell for it. That's how the trouble began. How did God meet it? He met it morally and properly by One who showed absolute obedience and dependence upon God. That was the way the Lord Jesus defeated Satan, defeated him morally and absolutely. That moral victory was won: the Lord Jesus did it at infinite cost to himself. Let us just take account of Him in the garden; let us as it were watch with Him and let our souls and spirits be affected by the glory of One who wrought so wondrously for God.

I believe we will praise the Lord for many reasons in heaven but one of the reasons will be what He accomplished on that wonderful day. It will never be forgotten, God will never allow it to be forgotten; it stands for time and eternity and the One who did it is there for time and eternity. The Lord Jesus will be praised. 'Bless, bless the conqueror slain'. A song in heaven, it is a song that goes on, I think, according to Revelation: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain". How worthy He is indeed! It is to deliver us from self-importance. To show that He is Supreme to everyone! It was certainly to deliver the Corinthians from their 'I of Paul, I of Apollos, I of whoever'. Where did any of those people rate? Men used of God, I admit, but where do they stand in relation to Christ? Nowhere at all! He is Supreme. What a wonderful person He is. How rightly God has been pleased to crown Him with glory and honour. He has been anointed with the oil of gladness above His companions. These are the things God has done. God has done them because of what Jesus has wrought. "Thou hast loved righteousness and hast hated lawlessness; therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with oil of gladness above thy companions" (Hebrews 1:9). He is to be anointed in our hearts and minds and souls; He's to be anointed above everybody else. What a victory He has wrought!

Well I come to Ephesians because this tells us about some of the things that we are to do. If the Lord has triumphed wondrously then we are to be those who triumph as well. It says “For the rest, brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the might of His strength”. Oh yes, there’s no way we’re going to win this kind of battle without the Lord’s strength. His strength has been demonstrated, He has taken away the armour of the foe, taken away the armour in which he trusted, defeated him completely. Here Paul reminds us what some of these things are: the artifices of the devil, principalities, authorities, the universal lords of this darkness, spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies. “Put on the panoply of God.” This is the armour of God; this is what God provides for every believer to put on. Perhaps it is a matter of concern to us as to whether we have put it on. In the Tower of London or where you see displays of armour you’ll see some pretty heavy pieces – two or three pages had to help a man put on his armour. We have to be spiritually exercised as we put on these items.

I don’t want to go through them all but I just want to draw your attention to two or three and the first one is to stand, having girt about your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness. This is so that we can stand. This isn’t to go marching off into the enemy’s territory – it is that we should be firmly grounded that we should stand and be able to defend what we’ve got. Do you remember one of David’s mighty men? He defended a plot of lentils. I used to think that was a rather strange thing to be recorded for the activity of a mighty man; after all one of them had smitten a lion in a pit on a snowy day. That sounded much more exciting. Here was somebody who was just to stand, and that’s important. We are to resist the devil and he will flee from us. We can’t resist him in our own strength but we can resist him in the strength and power which comes from the Lord, the One who has defeated him anyway.

I think our loins speak of where strength is. Job was told to gird up his loins like a man. Elijah girded up his loins and ran before Ahab,

miles of running into the city. It emphasises the kind of the strength and so I think it just brings it home to us: where are our energies going to be used? Are they going to be used for the Lord or are they going to be used for the things of the world that pass? I suppose the Corinthians had to be told to gird up their loins. They had got into all sort of moral chaos. Alas, I suppose they were just affected by the pagan kind of society that was around them and they imported some of those things into the Christian company. What does Paul do as a remedy for it? He reminds them “Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). What a reminder to believers. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Think of the greatness of that gift, that the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in you as a believer and that your body is His temple and so Paul goes on “glorify then God in your body”. I think I see Peter glorifying God in his body on the day of Pentecost when he stood up to preach with the eleven; what a moment that was! You could have pointed at Peter and you could have said ‘Ah but six weeks ago you were denying the Lord, with curses and swearing, what sort of man do you think you are, Peter?’ Peter would have said ‘Ah well, I've girded up my loins and I've got this breastplate of righteousness on. I'm not denying the Lord now. I'm standing for Him.’

What a result there was: three thousand converted in one day. Peter was there on that day of Pentecost; a kind of living example of a person who had put on the breastplate of righteousness, a person who was glorifying God in his body. He had dishonoured the Lord by that bad language and denial but he wasn't doing it then, his energies and power were directed at the things of the Lord. “Stand therefore, having girt about your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace: besides all these, having taken the shield of faith”.

I want to say something about the shield of faith. It's the thing with which you're able to quench all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. Faith means that you trust God, you believe God because He

says it. That was the basis of how we came into blessing, wasn't it? We believed God, we trusted Him. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. You take God at His word. You believe God because God says it. Very, very important in our day I think that we should just take God at His word.

Faith and confidence are slightly different. If you go and buy some milk in a dairy you have confidence that it's been pasteurised properly and, if you actually wanted to, you could take it away and analyse it and prove whether a proper pasteurisation had been done or prove whether there was anything that had been added to it. If that's what you wanted to do you could prove it. You don't actually do that because you have got confidence. We are to have confidence in God, of course, but faith means that you believe something that can't be proved and you believe it because God says it. Satan has got no answer to that. That's the shield of faith. It is the answer to all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. You know Satan's darts are inflamed. He comes to us at times with all sorts of suggestions: Do you really think the Lord will come? Do you really believe that? Yes! Well there's the shield of faith being lifted up. Satan comes to us with suggestions: Do you really think Jesus is all that people have told you He is? The answer again is Yes! The shield of faith is the answer to those inflamed darts.

The shield can cover any part of your body. It is not like a helmet or a breastplate that is fixed, it can go anywhere. Satan comes with the inflamed dart of self-importance to us sometimes and says, 'yes, the Lord did that but you did a bit of it didn't you? You really ought to claim some credit'. The shield of faith deals with that inflamed dart. You know the kind of things that may come to you. Luke wrote his gospel so that Theophilus might know with certainty the things that he had been instructed in so that he might be able to use the shield of faith. I think of all these bits of armour, the shield of faith is probably one of the most important, for practical purposes anyway. It quenches every suggestion of Satan who questions everything that God has said. The shield of faith says I believe what God says because He said it. If you come to me

with a proof of something different, I don't care. I remember when somebody was converted in Sevenoaks and it wasn't long before he was actually out on the street preaching. It was very evident that although the young man concerned didn't have very many answers to some of the things that people might throw at him he wasn't wobbled by them at all. Why? Because he believed God! He had the shield of faith. Very, very significant I think for our day.

Then there is the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is God's word. Praying at all seasons. Yes, these are significant too. The helmet I think is that our minds are continually drawn to the things of the Lord. Set your minds, said the apostle Paul elsewhere, on the things above where the Christ is. Yes, our minds can get filled up with all sorts of things and perhaps very worried by all kinds of things but let us set our minds, let us have this helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. Mr Darby is alleged to have said somewhere that he was not going to give up the sword of the Spirit because somebody told him it wouldn't cut. The sword of the Spirit is God's word: it is not only that it is God's word but there is a divine Person, the Holy Spirit, here to give power and effect to God's word, to make it mean something to you and me. Let me give you a little example, I'm a bit ashamed of this example really but I'll tell you it because I think it might do you some good. There was a time when I got curious about witchcraft and I went down to the library to look for some books about witchcraft. I found then that I hadn't got my library ticket with me. So I thought 'that's alright I'll come back tomorrow'. Well, it was the night of the Bible reading and the reading was going on and I wasn't terribly interested in it and I was flicking through the Bible and suddenly out of the pages of scripture there stood in letters an inch high "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22:18). That's the sword of the Spirit! He brings home God's word to *you* and He makes it mean something to meet *you* and to bless you, and to encourage you and to help you, and other people may not see it at all: nobody else in that meeting knew that anything was going on. They probably thought I was just uninterested but there it was, the Spirit of God brought something to meet my need and that's the

sword of the Spirit. The Spirit applies God's word so that it means something to you. It may be in encouragement, it may be in help, it may be in preservation, whatever it is, you can be perfectly sure of it.

The apostle goes on here about prayer. How important prayer is! You remember the Lord in the garden? According to Luke's account the scripture says "being in conflict He prayed more intently" (Luke 22:44). One of the greatest things in the Christian armoury is prayer. It's been well said that 'Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees'. That's why I read in Romans because what you get there is a very interesting thing about prayer. He exhorts the Romans to "strive together with me in prayers for me to God; that I may be saved from those that do not believe in Judaea; and that my ministry which I have for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints."

We don't always get the answer to prayer at once. We don't always feel the pressure of something relieved at once. It doesn't happen. Paul knew it. He knew he had a ministry for the saints in Jerusalem and yet here he was nervous, apprehensive, troubled about it, afraid about what might happen. The pressure of something isn't always relieved at once and that's really all I want to say about this matter of prayer. That's why I read this passage here. I read it because Paul said "strive together with me in prayer". It's a wonderful thing for a company to be joined together and striving together. Not striving *with* one another, that's not the idea at all. It's joined together in mind and heart to pray and to keep praying. The Lord Jesus gave that invitation to His own. He talked about that unjust judge and He told a parable so that so that people might always pray and not faint. God doesn't appear to answer at one time or the pressure doesn't seem to go away or things don't seem to change. What does the scripture say? Keep praying, keep relying on God, keep trusting in Him, pray, Paul says. If a company can be involved in it well so much the better. Wonderful thing in the prayer meeting, isn't it? Not with vain repetition but when perhaps you find at a prayer meeting with four or five prayers or maybe

more, everybody prays in their prayer covering one or two things that are exactly the same. Wonderful encouragement and it is just what Paul wanted. It puts the Ephesian scripture into context for us; prayer requires perseverance. What do we find? The Lord may not answer always but James tells us that “the Lord is full of tender compassion and pitiful” (James 5:11). Prayer is never wasted. Revelation 5 refers to the golden bowls full of incenses, which are the prayers of the saints. I believe that the prayers of the saints all down through the time have been stored up before God and they are brought before God and what a wonderful result. The day will declare the result of the prayers of myriads that have prayed. Paul says “strive together with me in prayers”. Remember that it might be a conflict. Remember it might be difficult. Remember God may not answer at once. But be quite assured of this, He will answer in His own time, He will bring a blessing far greater than you and I can ever imagine and when we get to glory we will see it. Until that moment may we be maintained, first of all keeping our eye on Christ as the One who has triumphed gloriously. And may we be blessed and preserved in the conflict here until He come. May it be so for His name’s sake.

Address at Honiton on 17 June 2000

HOW THE LORD HELPS WITH CHRISTIAN PROBLEMS

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat; but I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not; and thou, when once thou hast been restored, confirm thy brethren. And he said to him, Lord, with thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow today before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

Luke 22:31-34

And having passed through Phrygia and the Galatian country, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia, having come down to Mysia, they attempted to go to Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; and having passed by Mysia they descended to Troas.

Acts 16:6-8

Wherefore having much boldness in Christ to enjoin thee what is fitting, for love's sake I rather exhort, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also prisoner of Jesus Christ. I exhort thee for my child, whom I have begotten in my bonds, Onesimus, once unserviceable to thee, but now serviceable to thee and to me... but if he have wronged thee anything or owe anything to thee, put this to my account.

Philemon, verse 8-11; 18

It is a wonderful thing that the Scriptures were written to be a help to believers all down the ages. So when we read about experiences of persons in the Old and the New Testament, we find that under the ways of God things are written not just for them but for what would be useful right through the time till the coming of the Lord, and perhaps even beyond it for those who hear the everlasting gospel. Paul says to the Corinthians about the whole of the wilderness journey that these things happened as types of us (1 Corinthians 10:11) and they are therefore not only for the learning

of the children of Israel but for those in Corinth and for you and me. Sometimes we look at some of the things that are recorded in the history of people in the Bible and think: ‘Oh dear, what a tragedy that was! Oh dear, I wouldn’t have done that!’ It may well be the reason that we wouldn’t have done that is because it has been recorded for our instruction. I think it’s a great encouragement to view some of the experiences, problems and failures of men like David, men of God, and see how God came in for them and how they learnt the benefits of repentance and the knowledge of forgiveness and proving God’s help

That is why I read these three passages in the New Testament, one about Peter’s failure, one about Paul’s perplexity and one about the way that Paul skilfully uses the return of a runaway slave to say something to Philemon and to the brethren in Colosse where he lived.

I start with these words to Simon Peter. It is a familiar story of what happened. Peter volunteered that he would not deny the Lord, and that sadly is what happened. But the Lord says to Simon: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you to sift you as wheat; but I have besought for thee – or, I’ve prayed for thee – that thy faith fail not”. Then the Lord gives a promise to him, and He says “when once thou hast been restored, confirm thy brethren”. I think it is a very wonderful thing that the Lord looked beyond Peter’s failure to the time when Peter would be able to have learnt from it, and thus be able to confirm others as a result of what he had learned of Christ.

So we see here the way that God allows something to happen in a believer’s life, yet it is turned to account not only for the person concerned but for all of us. One of the things that this little passage teaches us is the blessedness of the Lord’s continued commitment to His own. The Lord Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen, He knew how Peter was going to fall, but nevertheless He prayed for him that his faith might not fail. And Peter’s faith didn’t fail! You might ask me what a failure of faith is. If Peter’s faith had failed he might have thought that he was useless and that he would

never do any good again, and he would have just disappeared. But Peter's faith did not fail and you can prove it from scripture because, when Peter was there in the high priest's palace denying the Lord, at the end of those three denials the Lord Jesus turned and looked at Peter. What does that mean? It means that Peter was looking at Jesus. He had not taken his eye off Christ, he was still looking at Him, he was still occupied with Jesus. Even when he denied Him saying: 'I don't know the man', he was still looking at Jesus. Think of the awfulness if, when the Lord turned to look at Peter, he had been looking out the window or away to see whether that maid was coming back to challenge him again. But no, Peter was still looking at Jesus, who was still the one person who occupied him more than anybody else, more than his own safety.

Now that He is in glory one of His great occupations is to make intercession for us. He is ever living to intercede for us. I am thankful He is praying for me! Yes, everyone here who knows anything about the deceitfulness of their heart is thankful that the Lord Jesus has prayed for them. Nothing gets us out of the reach of that intercession; yes, nothing at all! Why? Because it's based on His love, and His love for Peter was unchanged: and His love for you and me is unchanged. So Peter might fail, and fail very dreadfully, and we might do the same; but we can be assured as Peter was that the Lord prays for us. We can be assured as he was that the Lord's intercession continues and that it has been proved by His love – love that has been proved to the uttermost. Peter was going to get a great impression of that love, a great impression of His faithfulness, a great impression of the Lord's own grace.

I think you can see what that means when He says "and thou, when once thou hast been restored, confirm thy brethren". We see Peter after his restoration moving to confirm the brethren. The first part of Peter's restoration was when the Lord Himself appeared to him on that first day of resurrection. Remember, the disciples were together, and those two that had been off on the way to Emmaus came back and they found the eleven who said to them: "the Lord is indeed risen and has appeared to Simon". What had happened?

The Lord had appeared to Simon in His grace and Simon had immediately told the others. What was he seeking to do? He was seeking to fill out this commission to confirm the brethren. It must have been a terrible time for the apostles and others that had followed with the Lord. We get a feel for what it was like from the words and actions of those two going to Emmaus. As soon as the Lord appeared to Peter, I think he was ensuring that others knew about it so that they would be confirmed. This would be the first time he fulfilled this promise that the Lord had made to him.

Now one of the reasons I read this scripture, and all three of them, is the way that the Lord is able to turn even our failures and the things that seem to be catastrophes to account and a blessing; and so it was with Peter.

I think when you look at Peter's subsequent history you find that he was continually confirming others. You see it on the day of Pentecost. What confirmation it must have been to the others to see Peter on that day! When people were hearing the believers speak in different tongues, Peter stepped forward and was able to speak with such authority about what the Lord had done, and to point out the forgiveness that was available even to those that had crucified Him. Peter had learnt something of the grace and love of Christ, and he was able to pass it on to all those thousands that believed. How the brethren would have been confirmed through the bold and positive action of the apostle Peter! What lay behind it, I think, was this experience that he had had of the Lord's own forgiveness and the Lord's own grace and love. It enabled him to speak with absolute authority even to those who were guilty of crucifying the Lord.

Then you find an occasion when Peter and John had had a grilling from the chief priests and others and it says "they came to their own company" (Acts 4.23) and told them about their experience. Then they all praised God and prayed, and the place in which they were assembled shook. Now I think again the brethren would have been confirmed through Peter and John coming to them, and

giving them that account that resulted in such a wonderful response.

When Peter went to the house of Dorcas, who had died, he raised her up following the pattern of the Lord. When Jesus had gone to the house of Jairus He had done certain things: He put everybody else out, He took her by the hand and raised her up. Peter had learnt from that. When he came to the house of Dorcas he put everybody out, he knelt down and he prayed. Peter took Dorcas by the hand following the pattern of the Lord. What confirmation there was for the brethren! They were comforted by it. Peter filled out this commission time and time again.

Then he writes his epistles to believers of the dispersion, people who were under pressure, and tells them that their persecution was for “the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes” (1 Peter 1.7). How did Peter know that? I think it is partly based on what the Lord had said to him, “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not”. Peter knew the value of faith, knew the value the Lord put on it: and he wrote to those who were somewhat surprised and thought the fire of persecution strange, and he told them that their faith was much more precious than gold that perishes.

Towards the end of his life you find Peter still confirming the brethren. All sorts of things were affecting the Christian testimony and there was opposition, yet Peter writes in his second epistle that we have not been “following cleverly imagined fables” (2 Peter 1:16). No doubt people around then, like today, were saying that the things of Christ and what the disciples believed were just cleverly imagined fables. Nothing in them! Peter writes to those believers in Bithynia and elsewhere who perhaps were thinking things like that. He says ‘we’ve not followed cleverly imagined fables. I was an eye witness of His majesty when with Him on the holy mountain, ...and we have the prophetic word made surer, as of a lamp shining in an obscure place’. Peter at the end of his life was able to bring confirmation, not only to them but in the Spirit’s wisdom to you and me, with absolute certainty. He is saying ‘since

that event nothing that's happened in my life as a Christian had ever altered that impression I had of Christ then'. Passing it down as an old man as a result of experience with Christ is worth its weight in gold! He had been an eye witness of His majesty, and as a result the word was made absolutely sure to him. I am thankful for the words of the apostles.

When John tells us that his hands had handled the word of life you get a kind of shiver of authenticity coming through to you, because there was somebody who actually accompanied Christ and at the end of his life could write down what his experience was. The Spirit thought it was so valuable that He wanted everyone to have it available to read. I think you see how Peter's failure was turned to the most extraordinary account in the ways of God. And that is the way God works, the kind of thing He does. He uses the very failures and troubles that come into our lives to build up something of Christ in our own souls. In the apostle's case it was something that has come to you and me. In Peter's case it was confirming the brethren through knowing the wonder of that blessed Person. I think his wonder began when he first knew the Lord, and he fell on his knees and said "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord" (Luke 5.8). That wonder redoubled when the Lord met him on that first resurrection day, and the fruits of it come right down to you and me. We can give thanks to God for that!

In Paul in Acts 16 I found somebody who is perplexed. I didn't realise how deep his difficulty was till I looked at a map. You find that Paul here attempted to go to Asia Minor and then was forbidden. He then started to go to Bithynia and ended up on the way down to Troas. He must have covered about 600 miles in difficult conditions. Paul must have wondered what it was all about. He decided to preach in Asia but he wasn't permitted to, and then he thought of going to Bithynia. Peter was later to write to people in Bithynia, as we have seen. Paul obviously struggled with this situation, as we struggle sometimes to know what the Lord's mind is. I find something rather wonderful coming out of this, an event which took place about two or three years later when Paul

comes to Ephesus. He shifted those that were interested to the school of Tyrannus where he taught them for two years. The Holy Spirit makes a very interesting comment: “all that inhabited Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). At Ephesus people from Asia heard something of the glad tidings of Jesus, something of the great things of God, and took the good news back to where they came from. But however it worked out Paul would have realised just why he had found it so difficult to find out what to do when forbidden to go to Asia. He would find out that the Lord had a different way for him to reach those in Asia. In due time Paul gets to Ephesus and he stays there for a good period teaching the brethren: and the Spirit adds that all who were in Asia should hear. It is wonderful what the Lord had in mind!

You see particularly in the Old Testament examples of things that people were told to do where we cannot always see the reason for them. For instance Jeremiah was told to buy a girdle and then to go out to the Euphrates – a journey of about 1000 miles I believe – and bury it. He had to come back home and then he was sent back later to dig it up again. He finds that it had spoiled in the wet earth (Jeremiah 13). This was to teach him a lesson so that he would be more able to convey God’s word to the people of Israel that he was called to serve. Jeremiah had to do the same thing when he had to get a bottle and smash it (Jeremiah 19). Again it was just a help to him to convey God’s word. You see something of the same pattern of things being repeated here. Paul was not allowed to go to two places that he wanted to go to because the Lord had a different way in mind. But He still had blessing in mind for them. Paul was still going to be the actual key for that blessing since Paul would be the means whereby all in Asia would hear the word.

I just point that out to you because it seems to me that Paul’s exercise here is answered. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where nothing seems to quite work out; nothing seems to go as we thought it should. I have found these verses quite an encouragement. Why wasn’t he allowed to go to Bithynia, why was he forbidden to go to Asia? Yet a few years later he found out

what God had in mind. He has His way of bringing blessing, but we can rely on the Lord absolutely because He always has the end in view that there should be blessing and glory to God as a result. That was achieved even though Paul found it so difficult. I think it might be an encouragement if things do not work out as we might expect them.

Philemon is an interesting story. Philemon seems to have had a slave called Onesimus who ran away. It seems that when Onesimus ran away he stole something from Philemon's house which was in Colosse. Onesimus must have made up his mind to get to Rome and he wanted some money to help him on the journey. He took something from the house of Philemon and ran off. We are not told what happened to him after that, but obviously he did other wrong things and ended up in a Roman prison, the same prison as the apostle Paul. God has His eye over these things. Sometimes people try to run away from God Himself. God has a way of reaching them wherever they are. Philemon's house was a good house, it was a Christian house. We are told at the beginning of the epistle that there was an assembly which was in his house. The local believers met there just as they did in the early church when they broke bread from house to house. That continued for quite a time in various places and there was an assembly of believers in the house of Philemon. Perhaps Onesimus found that a bit irksome and he didn't like that kind of Christian background. He ended up in the same prison as the apostle Paul. In the wonderful ways of God he came to know Christ through the witness of Paul. Paul rejoiced in this and he describes him as "my child whom I have begotten in my bonds". I think that shows us something rather wonderful about the apostle Paul. He had known what it was to preach to large numbers of persons, but here when he was in prison he must have felt very restricted. But he took advantage of the opportunities that were available to him. Onesimus was one of those opportunities.

Sometimes we feel grieved that there are not more opportunities or that we would really like to do something bigger and better. All

those things may have gone through the apostle Paul's mind, but I think he rejoiced in the situation in which the Lord had put him. We also can rejoice in the situations in which the Lord puts us, however limited they may seem, and we can rejoice in the opportunities the Lord brings before us. So under the hand of Paul Onesimus came to know the Lord. Paul sends him back here with this letter that he writes to Philemon. It is an interesting letter in the way that Paul writes because he appeals to Philemon as a brother in the Lord. But he does more than that! It is generally believed that this epistle to Philemon and the epistle that was written to the Colossians were taken to Colosse about the same time. Now in the assembly meeting in Philemon's house there would have been lots of people who would have known about the running away and perhaps even the thieving that Onesimus had done. One of the things we find most difficult is to be forgiving. I know it in my own heart but I notice it too with others. But Paul wrote to them in Colosse and said to them "put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any should have a complaint against any; even as the Christ has forgiven you, so also do ye" (Colossians 3:12, 13).

Paul writes to Philemon saying "but if he have wronged thee anything or owe anything to thee, put this to my account". What is Paul doing? He's really taking the same line with Philemon as the Lord had taken with him. The Lord met us by taking the burden and the debt that's due from you and me, and He bore it on our account. Somebody said the other day that we die because we are sinners and the Lord Jesus died for our sins. He took the burden we had incurred. Paul at a much lower level says 'I'll make this as easy as possible for you. If he owes anything to you I'm quite prepared to repay it'. That's how much Paul loved Onesimus and how much Paul loved Philemon. He wanted Philemon to do the right thing, but more than that I think Paul uses this opportunity that he had in sending Onesimus back to Colosse to give them a practical example of forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven them. Paul says, 'I'll give you the best example I can'. He couldn't measure

up to Christ – no one ever could – but Paul very skilfully says ‘I’ll give you an example of what that means’. Perhaps it is not a problem to you but it’s a problem I find in my own heart. I think it’s a problem that recurs sometimes, that we find it difficult to forgive one another. Paul turns Onesimus’s failure to a way of blessing so that he could convey a message to those in Colosse to help them to be together as an assembly in the Lord Jesus.

I just commend these scriptures to you: Peter’s failure which resulted in him having such an impression of Christ that he could use it again and again to confirm the brethren. Paul’s distress and perplexity and the way that the Lord in due time answered it and brought about wide blessing in the whole of Asia: and Paul’s skilfulness in appealing to those in Colosse so that he not only wrote exhorting them but would give them a practical example to show them what it really means to be forgiving to one another “as Christ has forgiven you”. May the Lord bless the word!

Address at Chester on 29 March 2014

HOW THE LORD MEETS WEAKNESS

But John, having heard in the prison the works of the Christ, sent by his disciples, and said to him, Art thou the coming one? or are we to wait for another? And Jesus answering said to them, Go, report to John what ye hear and see. Blind men see and lame walk; lepers are cleansed, and deaf hear; and dead are raised, and poor have glad tidings preached to them: and blessed is whosoever shall not be offended in me.

Matthew 11:2-6

At that time, Jesus answering said, I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in thy sight.

Matthew 11:25-26

Jesus then, lifting up his eyes and seeing that a great crowd is coming to him, says to Philip, Whence shall we buy loaves that these may eat? But this he said trying him, for he knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, Loaves for two hundred denarii are not sufficient for them, that each may have some little portion. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, says to him, There is a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two small fishes; but this, what is it for so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place: the men therefore sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and having given thanks, distributed them to those that were set down; and in like manner of the small fishes as much as they would. And when they had been filled, he says to his disciples, Gather together the fragments which are over and above, that nothing may be lost.

John 6:5-12

At my first defence no man stood with me, but all deserted me. May it not be imputed to them. But 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; and I was delivered out of the

lion's mouth. The Lord shall deliver me from every wicked work, and shall preserve me for his heavenly kingdom; to whom be glory for the ages of ages. Amen.

2 Timothy 4:16-18

I suppose there are times when all of us are particularly struck with the demands of life and the weakness that marks us: weakness perhaps in faith, weakness in our understanding, weakness in our localities, weakness in many other ways. I suppose there are many ways, many times, in which this comes home to us, and it led me to think of these three scriptures. John the Baptist was marked by weakness of faith – suddenly his faith wobbled, sometimes that happens to us. In John 6 we have Philip overwhelmed by the character of the demand that was being made upon him: how could he possibly meet this? And finally the apostle Paul at his first defence, probably not actually before Nero but at some sort of preliminary hearing. Nevertheless it was a rather frightening situation, so frightening that everybody had run away; Luke and various other folk that had been with Paul had all left him. I don't blame them – a terrifying business, this, and Paul at his first defence is feeling his weakness and the exposed character of what he was faced with.

I've read these three passages so that we might look at them together and perhaps be encouraged ourselves, to see how the Lord strengthens, brings in help and blessing. In Matthew 11 John the Baptist is in prison, because he'd spoken against one of Herod's improper marriages. There he is, and I suppose reports were coming through to him of what the Lord was doing: blessing and healing and so on, and perhaps John was beginning to think 'if this is what's happening why isn't some of this power devoted to getting me released, getting some help for me?' Whatever it was, John began to feel his faith wobble. Has your faith ever wobbled? Mine certainly has! So I think this account of John is given to us so that we might see something of the blessedness of the way the Lord meets it. If we didn't know something of our own hearts we might be surprised that John said "Are we to wait

for another?” We might have thought, surely, John, you of all people would know.

When the disciples of John come to Jesus the first thing to notice is that the Lord doesn't upbraid John at all. He doesn't make any critical comments at all; you see, the Lord knows our hearts and He knows just how we're feeling and just why we are feeling the way we are. In fact He knows us better than we know ourselves. How often we read in the gospels in relation to the Pharisees and so forth “knowing their heart”, “knowing their hypocrisy”: I think we could say of John ‘knowing his genuineness, knowing how true he was’. So the Lord doesn't upbraid him, but equally He doesn't just send a message which says ‘Yes! I am the One. You haven't to wait for somebody else.’ He does something rather more wonderful; He sets out to prove to John just who He, the Lord, was, proving it to him by this list of things that were actually happening there in their midst. Nobody could gainsay them. These disciples of John, they saw blind men seeing, lame people walking, lepers cleansed, deaf hearing, dead raised, poor having glad tidings preached to them.

I believe that dead persons were actually raised for them to see. The Lord was marked out Son of God in power by resurrection of the dead (Romans 1:4), and that's not His resurrection, it's the resurrection of dead persons. There were some here who were brought to Him who were dead and the Lord raised them so that John's disciples might be able to go back to John and tell him ‘this is what we've actually seen’: not just a message ‘Yes I am’ but a message that would carry its own conviction and power, because the evidence of who was there in the Lord was demonstrated to them in a way which just couldn't be set aside. I think that's rather wonderful – the length to which the Lord goes to bring John's faith back to life. It was also important that Thomas shouldn't lose faith (John 20:26). I think we could say that the Lord Jesus knew exactly the reality that lay behind Thomas's doubt, and as a result the Lord moved to remove it just as He did with John the Baptist. I love to think of Christ taking these simple steps in His grace,

going out of His way to convince John that He was truly the One that was to come, the One that John had truly testified to.

Then the Lord does something else; later in the chapter which we didn't read, He speaks about John the Baptist. He's not going to allow anybody to denigrate John for this failure of faith. He brings home just how great a servant John had been; but where we did read I think the Lord brought out for His own disciples and for us the wonderful way that He met the same kind of challenge for Himself. The background is found in verse twenty: "then began He to reproach the cities in which most of His works of power had taken place because they had not repented. Woe to thee, Chorazin! woe to thee Bethsaida!", and then "and *thou*, Capernaum, who hast been raised up to heaven, shall be brought down even to hades. For if the works of power which have taken place in thee had taken place in Sodom, it had remained until this day". No doubt about that – this is the Lord speaking! But think of the Lord faced with this challenge: it is what I suppose the prophet speaks about when he says prophetically of Jesus "I have spent my strength for nought and in vain" (Isaiah 49:4). That is how the Lord felt, and yet what does He say here? He falls back on something that was absolutely reliable. "Jesus answering said, I praise Thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for thus has it been well pleasing in Thy sight". He delighted in the Father's will, He delighted in the Father's pleasure, He rested in the Father's love. Whatever the outward signs, whatever the circumstances that the Father had allowed, He was resting in His confidence in the Father and in the fact that He delighted in what pleased the Father. "Yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in thy sight". The Lord had a particular delight as man here in doing the Father's will – "My meat is that I should do the will of Him that has sent me" He says (John 4:34). There was never the slightest deviation with the Lord Jesus from the Father's will and the Father's actions and thoughts – it comes out extraordinarily at times.

I once came across a comment that if the Lord hadn't prayed on the cross "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) the Father would have swept the world with judgment. But nothing could be further from the truth, because when the Lord uttered those words they were the very words the Father wanted to be uttered. The Father's will, the Father's delight, the Father's interests, if it was of the Father then the Lord Jesus was absolutely at one with it. And I think He draws it forward for us in times of discouragement. The Lord had faced discouragement – the cities where He had laboured so much and so fully had all rejected Him, and He doesn't question it. He simply says "Yea, Father, for thus has it been well pleasing in thy sight," and if it was well pleasing for the Father it was well pleasing for the Lord. He invites us later in this passage to come into the same relationship with the Father as He had. "All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son but the Father, nor does anyone know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom the Son may be pleased to reveal him. Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:27-30). He is saying that no one can know the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son is pleased to reveal Him: and that's what He immediately proposes to do by saying, 'come into this place of sonship, come into this place of knowing the Father, in that same way, knowing the Father's will and pleasure'. Just as it was pre-eminent with the Lord so it can be with us. I think He brought this forward as part of His answer really to John (not that John was actually involved in it) but as something that the disciples would take account of and would come down to us: just as the Lord rested in the Father's will, so can you and I with absolute confidence, absolute stability, and He set the blessed example of it.

In John 6 we find another kind of pressure, pressure that perhaps we will fall under too. Here are 5000 people coming to the Lord. I find it very interesting that this is the only miracle that's recorded

in all four gospels. I think that means that it must have some particular significance for our own time. Every gospel says something about this feeding of the 5000. It has often been used in the way that I'm using it now as a situation of pressure, a demand made upon Philip. His first reaction is a very natural one, he says, 'wherever can we find the answer to this problem; however can we do this?' The testimony of our Lord is full of demands that we can't meet in our own power. They are way beyond the limits of human sufficiency and Philip was quite right to say 'How can we do this?' The Spirit adds this little comment that the Lord said this trying him for He knew what He was going to do. I always love that passage – He knew what He was going to do because that's what the Lord does all the time. He knows exactly what He's going to do; we may not see it, we may not understand it, but He knows very well what He is going to do. Andrew, as a man of faith, manages to pick up on this, as it were, and he brings something forward: while it seemed almost impossible that these few loaves and fishes that this little boy had could come anywhere near to meeting the need, Andrew I think shows that he had faith, faith in Christ. Don't look around for a solution, look to the Lord. He knows what He's doing; the solution that He comes up with may not be quite what we thought of at all. I don't suppose Andrew expected these loaves to be made into this huge quantity that was far more than at the beginning. But the Lord had the solution. Andrew says, "there is a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two small fishes". We may feel how limited we are, but I think the message of this scripture is very simply that we need to put these things in the hands of Christ. Jesus took the loaves and having given thanks distributed them to those that were set down, and there was no lack at all. I think it is to remind us that whatever the demand, whatever the limitation seems to be – and there is plenty in the present time – that looking to the Lord He will come in with an answer. It may be a different answer from what we thought but He has limitless power at His disposal, "all power", He says, "has been given me in heaven and upon earth" (Matthew 28:18). There's no limit to it. He goes on to

say “*I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age*” (verse 20).

When I first went to work it was around about the time of the Cuban crisis (1962). There were crowds of people who were scared there was going to be a war and that the world was going to come to an end with some sort of great nuclear explosion. I remember thinking of those words in Matthew (as they are given in the Authorised Version) “*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*” Even if the world ends, the Lord’s power in relation to His people does not end – it goes on forever. I think there’s a lovely message of encouragement and hope that comes to us through this passage, through Philip’s rather helpless answer, and through Andrew’s faith that brings forward something so small that you wouldn’t think it would be any good, but in the hands of Christ can be made perfectly acceptable. He has all power in heaven and upon earth.

I think Paul proved that in 2 Timothy. It opens with an exhortation to Timothy himself not to be “ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner” (2 Timothy 1:8). Then at the end Paul speaks of his first defence, and very scary it must have been. The Roman Empire under Nero wasn’t the friendliest of places to be, and I can well understand why everybody rather slunk into the shadows and Paul was there alone. But, he says, “The Lord stood with me, and gave me power, that through me the proclamation might be fully made” (Chapter 4:17). I think in one sense this was the height of Paul’s service. I say that because when he was commissioned, what was he commissioned to do? He was commissioned “to bear my name before nations and kings” (Acts 9:15), and I think Paul looked at this circumstance as being one of the heights of his calling as an apostle. He would have gone to this first defence with the consciousness that that’s what he’d been called to, and that’s what the Lord would support him in. The Lord had said to His own that when you are called before rulers and kings ‘don’t think beforehand of what you’re going to say, because you are not the speakers but the Holy Spirit’ (Mark

13:9-11). I suppose Paul would have followed those words up: I don't think he had planned a long address at this first defence, but he would have known there wasn't any need because the Lord was going to stand by him. He had called him to this, and this was something the Lord was going to support him in.

One of the things that our weakness brings home to us is that the Lord said to His own, "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). We find that in many ways, and one of the practical effects it has is that we don't want to do anything that the Lord won't support us in. Paul had the certainty here that the Lord was going to uphold him. It was part of the promise that had been made to him and so I think he went forward with perhaps more confidence than we might imagine. "But the Lord stood with me, and gave me power, that through me the proclamation might be fully made and all those of the nation should hear". Paul had an objective which he recorded in one Epistle as he laboured to present every man perfect in Christ (Colossians 1:28). There was no idea of limitation, and I think he would have rejoiced in this opportunity that "all those of the nations should hear"; and then he says "I was delivered out of the lion's mouth," but more than that, "the Lord shall deliver me from every wicked work, and shall preserve me for his heavenly kingdom; to whom be glory for the age of ages. Amen". I think sometimes of people in parts of the world where they have to face persecution, vicious attacks and things like that, and quite rightly and properly we pray for their preservation. But Paul looks beyond the immediate preservation which the Lord did grant to him, he was preserved from the lion's mouth, from being condemned I suppose; but he says "the Lord shall deliver me from every wicked work and shall preserve me for his heavenly kingdom". There was somewhere that he was going to be preserved for that was far greater than merely being preserved from the spite and anger of Nero. It was a preservation that would lead into this heavenly kingdom. Sometimes we pray for people who face persecution, and we find the Lord answers those prayers in different ways from what we'd hoped and the persons concerned are not saved in the sense of being preserved in their

natural lives. But nothing alters the fact that they are preserved for something far, far better – a heavenly kingdom! That’s what was the light in Paul’s soul. There was a heavenly kingdom that would far transcend everything else. Indeed, he says elsewhere that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed (Romans 8:18). Something laid hold of Paul that meant that while he desired to remain for the sake of the saints he also desired to depart and be “with Christ, for it is very much better” (Philippians 1:23). He knew that whatever way this worked out, he had the confidence that he would be preserved for that heavenly kingdom. It didn’t depend on Paul, it depended on Christ and His absolutely reliable heavenly kingdom. It leads him to burst into praise: “To whom be glory for the age of ages, Amen”. Doxologies come in strange places sometimes in scripture: one time Paul says “O depth of riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Romans 11:33). He is speaking of the fact that God has shut up all in unbelief that He might show mercy to all. It also leads him to praise when he thinks of the evil of men “who served the creature more than him who had created it, who is blessed forever. Amen” (Romans 1:25). What was the secret of it? Paul had in his heart something that was far, far greater than anything here. And that was this heavenly kingdom for which he knew that he was going to be preserved absolutely. It led him even then to say “to whom be glory for the age of ages. Amen”.

I just present these things for our encouragement and I trust that as seeing the way the Lord came in in relation to John the Baptist, in relation to the pressure on Philip, and in relation to this account of the apostle Paul, we might be encouraged and blessed.

Address at Defford on 10 May 2014

THE LORD'S PRAYER

And it came to pass as Jesus was in a certain place praying, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray even as John also taught his disciples. And he said to them, When ye pray, say, Father, thy name be hallowed; thy kingdom come; give us our needed bread for each day; and remit us our sins, for we also remit to every one indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation.

Luke 11:1

This is a part of the scripture which for a long time I used rather to gloss over, probably for a number of things: the way it is used or perhaps misused in many public settings. At school I probably didn't think what it meant, just something that had to be done. Then I picked up the suggestion that this prayer was really for the Jew and not for us at all! But when we look at this prayer we find that the principles of it apply all the way through. What the Lord was saying here covers features that He expresses in perfection Himself, and provides a model for you and me.

It may be useful to say that it is largely an individual prayer, occupied with aspects of our walk as Christians and the Christian testimony down here. It is a prayer too that will be on the hearts of the Jewish remnant at the end of the age. But equally there is something which is for us now. It is also interesting that this is the second time the Lord has put forward this kind of prayer. The first time is recorded in Matthew 6: He says to His disciples, 'Don't be like the nations who go to great lengths, thinking by their much speaking to be heard'. He then gives some very similar words to the ones that are here in Luke's gospel, but with some variations, but with very much the same kind of sentiment. It strikes a chord in my own experience, that when the disciples first heard this, it may not have meant very much to them. But here we find one of the disciples present when the Lord was actually praying Himself, and it led him to say, "Lord, teach us to pray". What he saw was the Lord in His perfect dependence and link with the Father,

because that is what the Lord's pathway was: it was a pathway at one with the Father, of absolute obedience to the Father. It seems that He spent the night in prayer before choosing the disciples (Luke 6:12); He prayed at the grave of Lazarus, and He had evidently prayed before He got there, because at the grave He said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" (John 11:41), referring back to something of which we are told nothing. The Lord must have prayed every morning, because it says of Him prophetically "He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed" (Isaiah 50:4). I think that as the Lord awoke He would immediately turn to the Father and ask about things that He was to do that day.

It is a wonderful pattern for us, that when we wake up we might ask God for His blessing, His guidance, and His help through the day. Then if we read the scriptures we may get a word that helps us as to the day. It is important to follow the pattern of the Lord, of turning to the Father at the beginning of the day. As a dependent man He is the pattern for us in everything, and if we look at the moral features of manhood in the eye of God the greatest of these is dependence. By being independent of God we get into all the difficulties that we do at times, whereas the Lord was here in perfect dependence. He made dependence attractive, and when one of His disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray", they saw a Man at home with God as His Father. The Lord starts from that very point and says, "When ye pray, say, Father". Saying "Father" to God is something which is really distinctive: great men in the Old Testament, David, Solomon, Daniel, Moses, Abraham, whoever they were, they did not know God in that way, for the simple reason that if God was to be known as Father the Son alone could reveal Him. Jesus came here with the purpose of making God known in that relationship of grace, and bringing those that trusted in Him into that relationship of privilege and blessing of which He speaks in John 17: "that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them" (verse 26).

This place of privilege and blessing is far more than the forgiveness of sins, great though that is. I don't underrate the forgiveness of sins, but the blessing of God goes on from that to bring us into the place of sons, clothed in all the worth of Christ, so that we can be in a relationship with God as Father. This is the relationship which the Lord Jesus came to make known and bring us into and it is the relationship which He Himself enjoyed in perfection, that He might be as it were a model for you and me.

He starts here and says, "Father, thy name be hallowed", meaning be honoured or glorified. Where is God's name going to be glorified in the present time? As I say, this prayer is about Christians down here, about the path of someone in this scene; so if I'm going to pray, "thy name be hallowed", it means it needs to be hallowed in my heart and in yours, honoured in my heart and my life. We find an example of the Lord doing this in relation to what lay before Him. He says "What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour" (John 12:27). Then He goes straight on as though dismissing that thought entirely, and says "Father, glorify thy name". It is a wonderful example from the Lord, but if I'm sincere in saying "Father, thy name be hallowed" it has to be something that affects me in my heart so that I honour Him. There was a Christian solicitor who worked for a large and impressive London practice. The first day that he went to his job there, he said, 'I prayed that I might be helped to show them that first day that I was a believer in the Lord Jesus'. That's the way that the Father's name is honoured, a commitment to God and to doing His will, so it comes out in many practical things.

The next thing is very similar, because it says "thy kingdom come". Now one day the Father's kingdom will come, in Matthew the Lord says "then the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43). The Father's kingdom is going to come to light in a very obvious way, but where is it at the moment? Well, it's in the heart and life of believers. The simplest idea of the kingdom that I can think of is a sphere where the Father's will is predominant. We see it so

perfectly in our Lord Jesus: hear Him in the garden of Gethsemane say “My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me”: and then He says “but not as *I* will, but as *thou* wilt” (Matthew 26:39). His was a whole life of following the Father’s will, “I do always the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:29). How He stands out, how worthy He is of our worship, how glorious above all others! Yet you and I may answer to the Father’s will and let what pleases God predominate with us. Sometimes it helps just to say ‘well, whose kingdom do I belong to?’ It can help to sort out decisions between one thing and another, because there’s a kingdom in this world to which as a Christian you don’t belong. It’s a kingdom that has Satan as its god and its prince. It does nobody any good to belong to that kingdom anyway!

In the life of Jesus we see that wonderful perfection in doing the Father’s will. He had no ends of His own to serve; He came just to fulfil the Father’s will, but He set that great pattern for you and me to bow to, “Thy kingdom come”. If that kingdom is going to come it has to come in my heart, it has to be that I give a bit more of my time, a bit more of my things to the Father, practical things. Thus the Father has an increasing place in my heart. I remember a brother quoting a poem by someone who said that when he started off with his life he wanted all of his things and none of God’s, and it ended up in the last verse that he wanted all of Christ! You see, the things of the world, the things of Satan, the things of the flesh, they have to be displaced if the kingdom of the Father is to have a greater place in your heart or mine. The Lord never intended that this prayer should just be uttered formally, but the principles behind it find us out. They cast us on the Lord, and on the Spirit, and on the Father, so that we might in our own lives find that the kingdom comes first, in my heart, and I trust in yours.

The Lord moves on in this prayer to our daily needs. I think He lived day by day, so it was “our needed bread for each day”. I don’t think this is just a reference to bread exactly or even to food, but that day by day the Father has an interest in us. The Lord says

“are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?... ye are better than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31). He said too that the hairs of our head are all numbered. The Lord brings that forward as an expression of the Father’s care day by day. I always find it very wonderful when I pray that I can speak to God about ordinary things like shopping or how to get a repair done. He is interested, and He has a mind about it. He is willing to listen and to help, and to find a way through in certain things that seem very difficult. It’s the measure of the Father’s care day by day: that’s the Father we know: that’s the Father that the Lord has brought us to, One who has infinite interest, infinite capacity and infinite care for His own. Nothing ever happens to believers without the Father’s knowledge, nothing happens without His having a purpose in it, and that purpose is to be for our benefit. We may not see it at the time; we may think, why did this happen, why were my plans disrupted like this? But the Father has had a purpose in it, and His purpose is absolutely sure and certain. It is very striking that the Lord includes this in His prayer to show us that the Father’s interest extends to the ordinary matters of life, things that cause a good deal of anxiety or trouble.

Then He goes on to say “and remit us our sins, for we also remit to everyone indebted to us”. This begins to put us on very humble ground. The Lord never had to pray for remission of sins: He was sinless and wholly sin apart. We find we need to do it probably more than once; Hebrews tells us that sin so easily entangles us (chapter 12:1), and we know that to be true. There are some who claim to be believers and say that they haven’t sinned for so many weeks or years! All one can say is that such have little sense of the holiness of God or of the deceitfulness of sin. Scripture says that we all often offend, and so we need daily to seek forgiveness for our sins. We can approach the Father very confidently about that, even the worst kind of sin. If you are a believer you are going to approach the Father, why? Because He is actually looking, not at your sin, He is looking at what Jesus has done. He sees us in the worth of Christ, and that is not to make us say we can continue

in sin that grace may abound, as Paul puts it in Romans (chapter 6:1): it's to give us the confidence to approach the Father. As soon as we are conscious of sin we can approach Him immediately and find grace for seasonable help (Hebrews 4:16).

Then there is another challenge, “for we also remit to every one indebted to us”. One of the saddest things that can happen in a Christian's life is to become unforgiving and hard. I know something about that, and I expect you do too. But remember what Paul says to the Ephesians, “be to one another kind... forgiving one another, so as God also in Christ has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). As we think how God in Christ has forgiven us, how much that should affect our lives and our relations with one another. Just think of how much difficulty is sometimes caused amongst Christians because of not listening to that exhortation to be kind and forgiving, even as God in Christ has forgiven you! So again we have a pattern, not of repentance in Christ – that's impossible – but we have a pattern of forgiveness in Christ. That was His prayer on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). What an extraordinary prayer! There were persons who had actually been engaged in nailing the Lord to the cross, putting to death the Son of God and casting evil reproaches upon Him. They even cast His very dependence upon Him: the chief priests said “he trusted upon God; let him save him now if he will have him” (Matthew 27:43). His very dependence, His greatest moral feature that shone in Him was used as something to condemn Him. “Father, forgive them” was the spirit of forgiveness that He said was to mark the age of the glad tidings. The character of forgiveness that we see in Christ is set forth as a model for us. ‘Be to one another kind and forgiving even as God in Christ has forgiven you’ – I think the Ephesians must have got on very well after that exhortation!

“Lead us not into temptation”. This doesn't mean that God tempts people: it is more, ‘do not put us to the test’. There are things in our lives that would stumble us or cause us to fall, and God keeps us from those kinds of things by His overruling. I'm profoundly

thankful for that, and it takes us back to another prayer of the Lord, the actual Lord's prayer, where the Lord says "I do not demand that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them out of evil" (John 17:15). He had already said "Holy Father, keep them in thy name" (verse 11). I'm profoundly thankful for those prayers of the Lord, because I think sometimes we do become conscious that the Lord or the Father has actually steered us away from something that would have damaged us, and could have caused us to be stumbled, just as poor Peter was brought into a situation he couldn't cope with in the high priest's palace. Peter learned a great deal from that, and we can be thankful that it's recorded for us so that we might learn from it too. We are all indebted to Peter in that way, but that's what happened: Peter got led into a situation, it seems by John (John 18:16) and he hadn't the ability to stand and as a result he fell very heavily. That's what the Lord means when He speaks to His disciples about praying not to be led into temptation. The last part of this prayer puts us all on the same ground, a ground of humility, a ground of lowliness that can't claim anything high or glorious for ourselves. It is our Lord Jesus Himself who has overcome the wicked one, as He says, "be of good courage: I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). How did He overcome the world? By breaking the power of its prince, and one day we shall see that that power has been broken absolutely and completely. It will be publicly obvious, but at the moment we go on as those who have to be humble and dependent and prayerful: not praying this prayer as a sort of rote, but conscious of these things which the Lord said were important in the life of the believer, that the Father's name might be honoured in my life, that His kingdom, His rule, is established in my life, and that I should be dependent and rely upon Him day by day. He knows my needs better than I do, so I call on Him day by day knowing how feeble I am in relation to what may be sinful and how easily sin can entangle me. I need to be lowly because we are not to have high thoughts but to think so as to be wise (Romans 12:3). High thoughts come to

us very easily because pride lies deep down in our hearts; even believers have pride. Mr Darby said that pride actually was the last thing to die in man, and pride asserts itself every now and again so that we become proud even of our lowliness, proud of our forgiveness. This prayer underlines dependence and would cause all of us to be humble and lowly, and helped to be maintained here in a way that is pleasing to the Father. The Lord was absolutely pleasing to the Father; He was delighted with everything His Son did. He is the pattern for you and me, and may we be helped in it for His name's sake.

Address at Hampton on 4 October 2014

THE LORD'S SUPPER

And all the assembly of the children of Israel departed from before Moses. And they came, every one whose heart moved him, and everyone whose spirit prompted him; they brought Jehovah's heave offering for the work of the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. And they came, both men and women; every one who was of willing heart brought nose-rings, and earrings, and rings, and bracelets, all kinds of utensils of gold: every man that waved a wave-offering of gold to Jehovah. And every man with whom was found blue, and purple, and scarlet, and byssus, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, brought them. All they that offered a heave-offering of silver and copper brought Jehovah's heave-offering. And every one with whom was found acacia wood for all manner of work of the service, brought it. And every woman that was wise-hearted spun with her hands, and brought what she had spun: the blue, and the purple, and the scarlet, and the byssus. And all the women whose heart moved them in wisdom spun goats' hair. And the principal men brought onyx stones, and the stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate; and the spice and the oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the incense of fragrant drugs. The children of Israel brought a voluntary offering to Jehovah, every man and woman whose heart prompted them to bring for all manner of work, which Jehovah, by the hand of Moses, had commanded to be done.

Exodus 35:20-29

The voice of my beloved! Behold he cometh Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills.

The Song of Songs 2:8

I want to say something, the Lord helping me, about the central place the Lord's Supper has in our Christian pathway. You might think it is rather strange that I have not read somewhere in the New Testament but the Old Testament was written for our instruction.

It fills out what is in the New Testament and shows us how the thoughts of God have gone through as one whole.

When I was reading this passage in Exodus a few months ago, I thought, ‘why have we got all this detail?’ And I began to see that there was a connection between what the tabernacle was to the children of Israel in their journey through the wilderness and what the Lord’s Supper is to us in our journey through this world.

The tabernacle was right at the centre of everything for the people and they camped round it in a certain order that was given to them by God through Moses.

I remember when I was a lad hearing persons say that when a godly Israelite got up in the morning the first thing he would do would be to go to the tent door, not to see what the weather was but to see what was happening to the cloud that represented the presence of God which was over the mercy seat over the ark. He would do that because when the cloud moved that was the sign that the children of Israel had to move with it.

And when the children of Israel moved forward they were led by the ark and they were led by the cloud. Every time the ark moved forward Moses prayed, “Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered; And let them that hate thee flee before thy face”. And when it stopped he prayed, “Return, Jehovah, unto the myriads of the thousands of Israel” (Numbers 10:35, 36)

And so to the Israelite the tabernacle was a real proof that God was with them and a real proof, too, that they were God’s people and they were different from the other nations. If you like, they were in enemy territory because whenever the cloud went forward Moses prayed that the Lord might rise up and deal with His enemies.

Those things remind me of the Lord’s Supper. We celebrate it in a world where Christ is rejected. He is hated, He is despised. It may not always seem like that, there may be certain times when people seem to give a certain amount of credence to Christianity,

but underneath all that, we live in a world where Christ is still rejected.

You see that if you go out into the street and you try and speak about the Lord Jesus. Nobody is very much interested and some people are quite opposed. Sometimes you find some interest and you give thanks to God for that. But the general thought of this world is that it can get on very well without God. The Lord's Supper is celebrated, as I say, in that kind of hostile environment.

The Lord set on the Supper to remind us of Him and draw our hearts very specifically to Himself. He saw that we needed to be continually reminded of Himself, what He has done, the greatness of His love and that we are in a world where He is rejected.

We very easily get drawn into the things of this world. I probably do not need to prove that to you – it happens to me in my heart, it probably happens to you in yours. We very, very easily get drawn away from the Lord; we forget that we belong to Another and that we are the people of God and that God has committed Himself to us.

The Supper was something given to us by the Lord, particularly because He saw that it was necessary for us. He did not specify how often it was to be celebrated although it does seem that in the early church it was normally held on the first day of the week. In Acts it says, on “the first day of the week, we being assembled to break bread” (Acts 20:7). Elsewhere in Acts Paul stayed seven days in two places (Acts 21:4; 28:14). I think Paul arrived on a Monday and he wanted to be with the Christians that were there on the Lord's Day; so he stayed there for seven days. But at any rate it is clear that they celebrated the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week.

The first day of the week has always been important, of course. Think about it. It was the day when the present creation began. We are told in Genesis that the work of creation took six days. It began on the first day with God saying, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3).

And then, of course, it was the day on which the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. Wonderful moment! He was “raised ... by the glory of the Father” (Romans 6:4) with the wonderful consciousness that all had been accomplished for God’s glory. Everything done! Peace had been made. The question of sin and sins had been dealt with to God’s satisfaction. The power of Satan, the power of death, broken! He annulled “him who has the might of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

I think it was because of that that Christians fastened on it as the day when they were going to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

And then there was another thing that happened on the first day of the week; 50 days later, 10 days after the ascension, the Holy Spirit came. The first day of the week was something that persons wanted to celebrate it repeatedly.

Scripture says, As often as you do this (1 Corinthians 11:25, 26). It does not say how often; that is left to our discernment. I think the judgment in the early church as guided by the Holy Spirit was that they needed to do this, repeatedly, so that their hearts might be truly drawn to Christ, freshly over and over again.

Our hearts are quite subtle. They are desperately wicked according to Jeremiah (17:9). But they are subtly wicked! Our hearts very easily get drawn away from Christ and from true affection for Him.

I think this passage, which talks about the way persons brought things for the tabernacle, gives us a clue as to some of the things that should affect us in relation to our coming together to remember the Lord Jesus.

Now, one of the first things that you notice is there is an immense emphasis on the heart. You find it in verse 21, “every one whose heart moved him”; you find it in verse 22, “every one who was of a willing heart”; you find it in verse 25, “every woman that was wise-hearted”; and then in verse 26 it says, “all the women whose heart moved them” and finally in verse 29, “every man and

woman whose heart prompted them”. Five references to the heart in nine verses is quite a proportion, is it not?

I think it is the first thing we need to think about in the remembrance of the Lord. It is not something we do as a duty. It is not something we do because it is Sunday morning and it is at a certain time. It is something we do because our hearts are affected by the love of Christ. The Supper is intended to particularly bring His love before us. He loved us and gave Himself for us. He loved the church and gave Himself for it despite everything that stood against Him.

“Having loved his own who were in the world”, it says, He “loved them to the end” (John 13:1). He said: “this is my body which is given for you” when taking a loaf (Luke 22:19). And He gave Himself, as we sometimes sing, ‘reserving nothing save the right to love’.

The Supper is intended to put our hearts in touch with that love and draw out an answer from us to Him. It is very, very easy to slip into the idea that it is something we do because it is Sunday or because we go there with others.

We should be so filled and so rejoicing in the love of Christ and the blessed way it has been expressed towards us that we just desire to give Him some return of praise and thanksgiving and love from our own hearts. “Every one whose heart moved him”! It is a matter of our hearts answering to His wonderful love.

I came across an interesting letter written by Elisabeth Elliott. You may not know who Elisabeth Elliott is but she was the wife of Jim Elliott who was a missionary and who in the early fifties went with four or five other Christians into Ecuador to preach the gospel. Sadly those who were there killed him and his companions. Elisabeth Elliott was a lady who used to meet with and break bread with other Christians. She wrote a letter, saying something like this. *You cannot imagine the wonder of the breaking of bread. We go there, not to get something but to give. We go there with hearts that are full of the love of Christ and we want to pour out*

something upon Him. I had not seen a description of the Lord's Supper like that ever before and that is why I quote it to you.

But that is it: we go not to get something but to give, not to seek grace or something like that but to pour out our hearts in an answer to the Lord Himself. An answer to His wonderful love! And you see, when we remember Him in that way, then it is that we are conscious of being in some way nearer to heaven.

We sing sometimes,

Now, in accord with the homage of heaven,
Rises a song from the hearts of Thine own.

He is crowned with glory. He is given every place of honour in heaven. We have the privilege in love of giving Him the place of honour and pre-eminence in our hearts and in our company so that we rejoice in Him and He rejoices in us. Because He does rejoice in us as we will see in the Song of Songs.

But it begins with, "every one whose heart moved them". That is the great key. It is love for Christ. Love in answer to His own great love! But if you do not feel that it is something that draws you to Him and makes you want to praise Him, pray to the Holy Spirit that He might help you to see it that way. I know what it is to be like that, even as a Christian! Pray that it might become something important to you as it was to the early church who came together with such enthusiasm.

It was not easy for them to come together on a Sunday. The Lord's Day was a day when people were generally at work. Many of them were, no doubt, slaves. Possibly it was after a hard day's work people met together to remember the Lord. And I think they did it with joy and gladness. Why? Jesus was everything to them! They were like these persons who brought something for the tabernacle, persons who had their hearts moved, they were wise-hearted. They were anxious to give some heartfelt response to the Lord Jesus Himself. I think that is the first thing that comes over in this passage.

And then you find that there was a very great variety of what was brought. There were utensils of gold. There was byssus and goats' hair, rams' skins dyed red. There was acacia wood and all sorts of things. No doubt people brought different things according to their different abilities.

And that is important, too. What can I bring to the Lord when I come to respond to Him? If it is coming from my heart it must be an appreciation that I have personally of Him. It may be a lot less than somebody else. I am sure it would have been wonderful to go to a meeting and hear Paul or John or even Matthias give thanks for the loaf and the cup. Two of them had companied with Christ and they had learned enormous things from Him. They had seen His love and blessedness so close at hand. Paul had learned His love, too. He had appeared to him, the chief of sinners, and he knew something of the love of Christ, "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

But the Lord is just as interested in what you and I can say in an appreciation of Himself. Now, you may say, my appreciation is ever so tiny. Never mind about that. Do not be put off from bringing it forward.

I do not want you to think, 'Well, that is good enough, so I can leave it at that'. Pray that it may grow. Read the scriptures so that it might grow. Occupy yourself with Christ so that it might grow. But the wonderful thing is that what the Lord is looking for is actually an answer from our hearts. Something that is real even if it is expressed very feebly, even if it is expressed with great hesitation – it does not matter. To Him it is beautiful and wonderful.

Think about this tabernacle. People brought gold and jewels and onyx stones and all sorts of precious things. Some people brought badgers' skins. Some people wove curtains of goats' hair. But, you see, when it was all put together they could look at that tabernacle and they could see that they had made a contribution to it. That tabernacle would not have been right if everything had not been given. Without badgers' skins it would have been deficient.

If there had not been some goat's hair woven together something would have been missing. Everybody's contribution counted whether it was something small or something big. Today everybody's contribution counts before the Lord. What did we sing?

The faintest, feeblest note they raise
Will reach the Saviour's ear.

We know that when we are converted! We perhaps called out very feebly to Him, perhaps hardly understanding what we were doing, not very conscious of our sinful state. But we called out to Him in our need and He answered us. The quantity, the volume, the way our contribution is expressed, is not important.

What matters is what springs from the heart. Mr Raven says about the Lord's Supper, everybody does the best they can. That is what was happening here, you know. People brought what they could. I do not think there was any spirit of criticism. When somebody turned up with an article of goat's hair woven together I do not think anybody said, 'Oh, sister, I know your fingers are arthritic but surely you could have done a bit better than that'.

The spirit of criticism at the Lord's Supper is hateful to Christ because if persons are expressing something that is truly their appreciation of Him that is something that the Lord rejoices in. And it is something that we need to encourage in one another and encourage in our own hearts, too. None of us brings very much when it comes to it! If we are honest there is room for more of an appreciation of Christ in every one of us. There really is! The Spirit would work in our hearts to create a desire that there should be a greater appreciation of Him and of His love and of the glory that He has as before the Father.

And now I want to draw your attention to where it says in verse 26, "and all the women whose heart moved them in wisdom spun goat's hair". I do not want the sisters to think they are in any way out of this. And this is partly, again, because it is a matter of the heart.

You see, somebody can be saying something and it does not mean as much to God because of it being merely words; it does not mean as much to the Lord as somebody just quietly in their heart worshipping Him, rejoicing in Him, joining gladly in the response that others give, joining gladly in the hymns as truly offering something to the Lord.

Sometimes we sing hymns fairly automatically. We know the words, we do not even need to look at a book. It just flows on and you sometimes think at the end of a hymn, ‘what was that all about? What was it, what did we sing?’ And you see, it was not exactly springing from the heart at all.

But what springs from the heart is valued wonderfully by the Lord even though it may be quite small in its content. But this is what there was and, as I say, every woman could look at that tabernacle and think, ‘Yes, I brought this, I gave up that gold ring, I wove that bit of stuff, I dyed that ram’s skin or whatever’. There it is, all brought together for the glory of God. And all brought together as we remember the Lord who is now in His glory.

And so we see how the Lord’s Supper is absolutely essential in drawing our hearts together as one in an answer to the Lord Jesus. There are varying appreciations, varying states of soul, varying histories, but they are all intended to be brought together in an answer of joy and thanksgiving and glory and honour to Christ. And He is worthy!

One day the whole church will be caught up and there will be the most wonderful expression of praise and thanksgiving that rises to the Lord, a most wonderful answer to His love. His heart will be filled with joy and rejoicing and our hearts will be filled with joy and rejoicing.

But the song begins now, with an answer of simple appreciation to the Lord for the greatness of His love. May we be encouraged to be occupied with Him. May we be encouraged to seek the Spirit’s help that we might be the more filled with appreciation of the Lord Jesus Himself. He is worthy of every honour. And when

we get to glory we shall just see how wonderfully glorious He was. But we will be thankful, too, that we had the opportunity in the present time to give Him thanks and to give Him praise.

I read the passage in the Song of Songs for a very simple reason. It shows the joy with which the Lord comes to His own. “The voice of my beloved! Behold, he cometh”. What is He doing? “Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills”. This is a wonderful picture of somebody just bounding across the hills and rejoicing in his strength and rejoicing to come to his lover. I think it just speaks of the joy the Lord has in those that remember Him.

It is a joy to Him to see persons coming together in the scene of His rejection and wanting to be occupied in His praise. If you want to give the Lord joy, think about that. Sometimes we can find very small reasons for not taking up the matter today. But if we really thought of how much joy it is to the Lord to see in this scene where He is cast out, persons who love Him enough gathering together to remember Him, then I think it would be an encouragement to us.

And then you see He comes with joy and rejoicing. It takes me back in my mind to that little passage in John chapter 20 where the Lord came to His own on that first day of the resurrection. He came with joy because He was the One who had come out of death and everything was completed to God’s satisfaction. He came to them as the One who was triumphant and glorious and had dealt with every foe. He had sent a message much earlier on in the day to those persons He called, “my brethren”. This message told them that they were brought into a new relationship altogether, a relationship with God Himself as Father that could not really have been known until the Lord Jesus came as the only begotten Son who could make the Father known so perfectly and so fully.

And He had told them that they had come into this new, living relationship with God as Father, “my Father and your Father, ... my God and your God”. He was associating them with Himself. I think He loved to come to them, to join them that night and then

He opened up the scriptures to them. It was not just a fleeting visit. It was something that the Lord, I think, had looked forward to all the day; of coming to His own and rejoicing in them and they rejoicing in Him.

This scripture, I think, gives us something of the enthusiasm with which the Lord Jesus came to His own on that day. And, if I might carry the analogy forward, the enthusiasm that He comes to people who truly remember Him. He comes “Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills”.

Then the way the verse begins gives us a clue to something else, “The voice of my beloved! Behold he cometh”. What is it? It is the voice of someone who loves Him. This is the true voice of the church as the bride of Christ. This is the one who will shine in glory, the one who through the whole of eternity will respond with joy and gladness to the heart of Christ.

What joy to the heart of Christ to have those who truly form His bride, who truly have that link with Him. They join together in an answer of joy and thanksgiving to Him.

It has another voice to us, too. Are we really looking out for the coming of the Lord? That is a challenge to me. Recently somebody prayed to the Father on a Lord’s Day morning that it might please Him to send the Lord now to take His own to be with Him so that we never had to go back into the world again. I must admit I was quite shocked. I remember my eyes flicking open and thinking, ‘No, no. I have to do this on Monday!’ Very easy to do, is it not? The Lord’s coming so often takes second place to other things that we want to do. We may even want to do them for Him.

It is very, very easy to get out of the spirit of listening for our beloved. Listening for Him to come! One day we will hear His voice. The dead in Christ will be raised and the living who remain will be caught up to be for ever with the Lord. What a moment it will be for us but what a wonderful moment it will be for Him to have the whole church.

Even the Lord has not seen it yet. Persons are still being added. Thank God for that. But then everything will be complete and the whole church will come together. May we be helped to listen with joy and thanksgiving, looking for the One who has loved us and blessed us.

I think it is in that time when we are so occupied with Him at the Lord's Supper we come nearest to heaven and when we are conscious of His presence. For years I struggled with the concept of being conscious of His presence and I think probably quite a few younger people do today. To me it seemed to be rather a fanciful idea, that the Lord was present and we could not see Him.

I now think the Holy Spirit would give us a sense of our nearness to Him when we speak to Him, when we give Him thanks for His love, when we respond to Him and thank Him for dying for us. When we respond to Him with joy and affection we are conscious that we are speaking to somebody who is not far away from us but actually near to us.

He is just as near as if you are having a personal conversation with somebody in a room. The Spirit gives us that sense of the Lord truly coming to His own, coming with joy and rejoicing in us and we are rejoicing in Him. We can understand how we rejoice in Him. He has done everything for us. He is wonderful. But it is a very wonderful thing, too, when we realise that the Lord Jesus rejoices in you and me.

He rejoices in us because of what we are to Him, for in the eye of God we are as pure of our sins as Christ is. Absolute cleansing, absolute perfection!

Psalm 126, says: "They that sow in tears shall reap with rejoicing: He goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for scattering; he cometh again with rejoicing, bearing his sheaves". It is just a picture of the Lord Jesus as rejoicing in those that belong to Him. He went out, He was the sower. He went out and He bore seed for scattering. He went out with tears.

Think of the strong crying and tears that, according to Hebrews (5:7), marked the time in the garden of Gethsemane. “He goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for scattering”. But what a harvest has been brought in as a result of His death on the cross! The Lord loves to present that harvest, you and me, to the Father. He says, “in the midst of the assembly will I sing thy praises” (Hebrews 2:12, and Psalm 22:22). He loves to present us in all His worth. We are accepted before God in the Beloved, in Christ. We stand before God absolutely perfect. In the Spirit’s power we can enter into that, perhaps very momentarily, but we can certainly enter into it as seeing that that is the standing that God has given us because we have trusted in that wonderful work of Jesus.

All the work was done by Him. That is why our praise is focused on Him. That is why we remember Him. That is why we rejoice to come together as those who love Him. Because we love Him He loves to come to us, Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills. He comes with enthusiasm and joy. And we too can greet Him with enthusiasm and joy.

In earlier years a brother gave an address on the Lord’s Supper. He ended his address by saying, ‘If you are a believer and you have never seen the Lord’s words “this do in remembrance of me” as a word to you may God open your heart to see it that it is a word to you tonight’. I too would like to end on that note. If you love Christ, just think about it: may God open your heart to see it as a word to you. May the Lord bless the word.

Address at Hampton on 24 November 2018

FORGIVENESS AS OUTLINED BY PAUL, PETER AND JOHN

We are ambassadors therefore for Christ, God as it were beseeching by us, we entreat for Christ, Be reconciled to God. Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in him.

2 Corinthians 5:20,21

To him all the prophets bear witness that every one that believes on him will receive through his name remission of sins.

Acts 10:43

My children, these things I write to you in order that ye may not sin; and if any one sin, we have a patron with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world.

1 John 2:1

I want to say something tonight with the Lord's help about the forgiveness of sins. You might think that is a very basic idea and in a way it is, but it is the most important thing ever for you and me to find that we have forgiveness from God. It is the most important thing that will come into your life.

There was a famous medical doctor who was knighted for his work in discovering uses of chloroform. He lived a fairly godless life for many years but he came to know Jesus and it changed his life. He knew forgiveness through Jesus Christ. One day he was going to give a lecture on the greatest discovery of his life as it was billed and many people went along to hear him thinking he was going to talk about the experiments he had done with chloroform. Instead of hearing anything very much about that they heard him say that the greatest discovery that he ever made in his life was the fact that he needed and had found a Saviour through whom he could have forgiveness.

David says in Psalm 130 verses 3 and 4, “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared”. The Psalmist is not talking about fear in the way of terror, but if you have not found God as a forgiving God you may well be afraid of Him. When it says “there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared”, it is in a sense that God may be known and that there might be a relationship with Him. That is what God wants, that is why the gospel is preached so that there might be a relationship between God and you, not one of fear and terror – not one of forever looking up and wondering if something dreadful is going to happen to you – but a relationship whereby you know God is a God of love, a God who has forgiven you and who has blessed you. He has always been like that.

I have read these passages from these three great men of scripture, the apostle Paul, the apostle Peter and the apostle John. I could have read from just one of them but I wanted to read from three people because when three people tell you the same thing it begins to carry some conviction. These three persons Paul, Peter and John knew what it was to be forgiven. They knew what it was to be sinners and they knew what it was to find a Saviour in Christ. Paul was a great sinner; perhaps you relate quite easily to that. He was a man who persecuted Christians, and put people into prison, perhaps even put them to death, certainly giving his vote for that to happen, and Paul found Jesus as a wonderful Saviour.

Peter was a great sinner, and perhaps we often talk about Peter and some of his failures and some of his sins. What we are told about Peter in the gospels and elsewhere shows just what a great man he was. His life is exposed by the Spirit of God for our instruction. It is not exposed that we should say how dreadful, but that you and I might learn something from it. The very fact that the Spirit could use Peter in that way brings home to you how great he was. Peter was a great sinner and he knew it, and you know that, because when he first met Jesus he fell at Jesus' knees

and says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord” (Luke 5:8). What did he see in Christ? He saw absolute perfection, he saw something he had never seen before, something that convicted Peter of his sins and he immediately fell at Jesus’ knees. What did Jesus do to him? Did He tell him ‘go away you sinful man’? No he did not. He took him right into His company and that is what Jesus wants to do for you tonight. That is why the gospel is preached.

John was a sinner too. We are not told quite so much about John but I am sure he would not be able to stand up and say that he was without sin. He tells you about that. It was John along with James who wanted to call down fire from heaven. It was quite out of character of being in company with the Lord Jesus. It was John who saw somebody casting out demons in the name of the Lord and he told them to stop as they were not in the same company. John was a man whose sins may have been very different but he still knew he was a sinner. In fact it is John who tells you that he who says he is without sin is actually doing something very, very dreadful. He is saying to God ‘You are a liar’. You think about that. Those who say we have no sin make God a liar and His truth is not in us. I once was talking to a man in the street and he said he had never sinned. Well, he was telling lies. He was sinning then if he had never sinned before but he was doing something worse than that. He was saying to God ‘You are a liar’ because God’s word tells us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Every one of us, however long or short our lives, have in one way or another sinned and therefore if we would be right with God every one of us needs to know forgiveness of sins.

These scriptures speak first of all of the basis of the forgiveness that God offers. Paul in Corinthians and Peter in Acts tell us how we can come into that forgiveness. John in his first epistle tells us something about how we are maintained in the knowledge of that forgiveness.

I want to begin with Paul because he tells us of the great basis of God's forgiveness, the wonderful way in which God has moved from His own side to meet the whole question of our sins and the whole principle of sin. They were both met by the way that the Lord Jesus Himself came here to give Himself as that perfect offering before God. There was no other way whereby sin could be met righteously and properly. God wanted to meet that matter because sin had come in and brought great distance between God and us. Remember when Adam committed that first sin; the only thing that Adam could do that was wrong, he did. There was only one thing he was told not to do, not to eat of the fruit of a certain tree. Adam and Eve did just that and immediately they became conscious that something had happened in their relationship with God. Therefore when they heard His voice in the garden they hid themselves and ever since then people have been trying to hide from God in one way or another. They push Him out of their thoughts, push Him out of their minds, pursuing every kind of entertainment, throwing themselves into their work and all manner of things and activities as ways of hiding themselves from God. Scripture speaks of persons not wanting to have God in their knowledge.

God appeals to you in the gospel, Paul here in Corinthians tells us of God beseeching. He is a God who wants you to be in His presence, a God who wants you to know His love and His blessing. Therefore He has laid the most perfect basis for the forgiveness of the sinner. There was One here, our Lord Jesus Christ, who came to do God's will and that will was the way of reconciliation, that His way of forgiveness should be brought to pass. There was only one way that God could righteously forgive sins and that was to visit the judgment of sin and the judgment of our sins upon a victim. The One who came to be that victim was our Lord Jesus Christ. He came for that very purpose. In Him sin was not, He was wholly without sin, nothing that He saw or read or heard appealed to Him in the slightest in the way of evil. How different He was from us. We may see hoardings and realise that

they may convey a rude sentence to us because we are sinners. Such things would have had no effect on Jesus whatsoever; He was holy, He was harmless and He was separated from sinners. This was seen so wonderfully at His mockery of a trial. When He was reviled He reviled not again, when He suffered He threatened not. And when you think of that, it would have been no idle threat. The Lord Jesus told Peter to put the sword into the sheath. He said, “thinkest thou that I cannot now call upon my Father, and he will furnish me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). Think of the way the earth could have been swept to judgment but Jesus came instead to bear the judgment. It says here “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their offences”. Not saying ‘sinner, I see what you are like’, not saying that at all, but knowing what our offences are yet not holding them against us. Jesus came in that way not to reconcile God to us but us to God. God was always towards us and always wanted to be known in love and forgiveness.

There is a passage in Isaiah which gives you a hint of what perhaps God did in a previous age. It says of the earth, “not as waste did he create it: he formed it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18); yet in Genesis we read “the earth was waste and empty” (Genesis 1:2). God did not create it that way; something happened. God could have met the challenge of sin after Adam and Eve’s disobedience with immediate judgment. He did not choose that way but chose to meet the challenge of sin by the expression of infinite love in the giving of His Son. He is the One who came to bear the judgment on our behalf. You are the object of that love and you can come into the good of that love tonight by trusting in Christ. There is a work that Jesus did that is absolute and rock solid in terms of meeting every claim of God’s holy throne. That is what happened at Calvary. “Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us”. The Lord Jesus actually became sin and He bore God’s judgment in those three hours and that is why He was forsaken. We cannot fathom what happened in that time. Isaiah tells us His soul – His very inmost being – was made an offering

for sin (Isaiah 53:10). It pleased God to bruise Him, and it says through His stripes we are healed. That is nothing to do with the scourging at man's hand; it is the fact that Jesus bore the judgment of God, the judgment that was due to you and me, so that there might be a way of absolute, solid, secure forgiveness for us. So that: "him who knew not sin was made sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in him". Thereby is the door for your blessing, thereby is the way into eternal life, thereby is the way of forgiveness, forgiveness that is absolutely righteous because Jesus bore and exhausted God's judgment. No one else could do it, no one else could even think of doing it. The Son of God came Himself to be the Saviour, so God has that absolutely certain way of forgiveness because Jesus has borne the judgment that was due to you and me.

Peter will tell us how we come into that forgiveness. Peter was talking to Cornelius who was a Roman soldier, a man who had never actually seen Christ in the flesh. Peter says to him, "all the prophets bear witness that everyone that believes on him will receive through his name remission of sins". It is absolutely certain, you see, that whatever the sins, whatever the past that has come in to any of our lives, Christ can meet it perfectly. There is a way into blessing, a way that is open to anyone, to whosoever will.

Mr Coates tells the story of the American Civil War where some freed slave rendered a particular service to Abraham Lincoln's troops and as a result the President himself presented this man with a pension. It was a great scroll signed by the President with so much to be paid per year, but this man apparently never understood quite what it was about and nobody took the trouble to tell him, and so he wore it round his neck like a kind of charm for years. He died in poverty and had never once claimed what was available to him. There are people like that in relation to the gospel. They know the terms of it, they have read about it in the Bible, perhaps heard people preach, perhaps want to know something about the plan of salvation but they never ever come to

know the person in whom salvation is. Herbert Gill, who was a great preacher in the 19th century, was once asked by somebody to tell him the plan of salvation. Gill said that there is no plan at all, it is a Person and One in whom you must trust.

He gave Himself, He suffered “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). He is worthy of your trust. God has demonstrated the fact that Jesus has completed everything satisfactorily by raising Him from the dead to His own right hand in glory, crowning Him with glory and honour. God is fully satisfied with the work of Jesus. The Saviour is presented here as One to whom “all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him will receive through his name the remission of sins”. You feel a sinner, you feel the need of forgiveness, you want to get right with God, and if you feel like that the Saviour is just so available to you. It does not depend exactly on the depth of your repentance; it certainly does not depend on your making a list of all your sins. I could never remember all mine anyway. God does not intend to occupy you struggling, sitting there wondering whether you sinned yesterday. No indeed! Peter says here everyone that believes in Jesus and owns they are a sinner can in effect say to the Lord, ‘Yes Lord I see that you were there on Calvary's cross just for me’; that is what believing means.

People sometimes say I believe the creed, I believe the Bible, I believe this or that but they do not trust Jesus. Cornelius trusted Jesus absolutely. I remember reading about a man who was reading a tract, a famous tract called Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment; through reading the little story in that tract he came to see Jesus as somebody whom he could really trust and trust absolutely for himself. That is exactly how Jesus is. Who would tell you it? Peter will tell you it, John would tell you it, they had no doubt at all. Peter when he began preaching said that there is no other name given whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Why was Peter so absolutely certain? It was because he knew Jesus as his Saviour. If anything united those three men it would be that

Christ is a wonderful Saviour. They all proved it for themselves and the wonderful thing is that you and I can prove it too.

You can see that He is a wonderful Saviour. If you do not feel that He is real just cry to God to make Jesus real to you as a Saviour and come to Him. Simply trust in Him, own up to the fact that you are a sinner and that you need a Saviour. Rely on His finished work. It is His work, not ours; His work alone can save and save completely. The Bible tells us that ‘he is able to save completely those who come to God by him’ (Hebrews 7:25). He wants you in His presence, He wants you to know Him, to know His love and His blessing. He wants to bless you forever, bless you eternally. The beginning of that blessing is in each turning from their wickedness.

Peter knew what it was to be turned and to be changed and He knew the wonder of that transformation. Thousands of other persons have known the wonder of that transformation. There are accounts of persons who have been transformed from being drug addicts and alcoholics. Transformation is not limited to those kind of people; every one of us needs that change, every one of us needs to be forgiven. David said “against thee, thee only, have I sinned” (Psalm 51:4) but “there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared”. We need that forgiveness. Peter tells us very simply the way into it, “to him all the prophets bear witness that every one that believes on him will receive through his name remission of sins”. Will you come to Him? Will you come quietly as it were?

John tells us just how we are maintained in that spirit of forgiveness. John is realistic. I was converted at the age of four and as you can imagine the number of sins that I have committed since I was converted have been far more than the sins I committed before. John says, “If any one sin we have a patron with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”. After we come to Christ, sadly we very often fall into one kind of sin or another, evil thoughts, evil actions, things that are displeasing to God,

things that are unholy and things that if they are persisted in bring in unhappiness and cause us not to be in the enjoyment of our link with God. They never change our salvation; once we have trusted in Christ that is sure and firm and forever because of what Jesus did at Calvary's cross. It does not depend on me; it is not to make us careless but it does not depend on us. The cleansing that the Lord Jesus offers as we come to Him in our sins and trust in Him is complete and perfect and forever.

John recognises that even as Christians we find that we fall into sins and wrong things, and he says, 'if we sin we have a patron with the Father, One who takes up our case in heaven'. I love to think of Jesus in this way; it brings home something of His love and His care and with it He watches upon us. It is not if any one repent, it is if any one sin – when I am in the very act of sinning the Lord Jesus is in the very act of taking up my case on high. I turn to Him and repent **because** He has taken up my case. I love to think of this way of the Lord Jesus as a patron with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is called that because it reminds us that there He is in heaven, the absolutely righteous One, absolutely finished with every question of sin. It never alters my eternal salvation. Everything that I may do even as a Christian that is wrong is met by Him because He is Jesus Christ the righteous and it is that blessed One who takes up our case.

For example, sometimes important charities have a patron, a well-known or important person who is linked with the charity. Sometimes you may read or hear that these charities have got into difficulties. What has happened is that they have not acted in accord with the greatness of the patron. Jesus is our patron and when we sin He is there to take up our case, but another side of this is that as a believer I do not want to act in a way that reflects anything against His dignity, just in the same way as an organisation should not be acting against the interests or greatness of the patron that they have. You and I as Christians have the greatest patron of all time, Jesus Christ the righteous.

It is not to make us careless; it is to make us cautious and careful that we desire to please Him who has given so much for us. He gave His life, He gave everything for us because He saw that if He did not come in and meet our need it could not be met at all. But blessed be God, He has met our need perfectly and as we trust in Him our sins are gone in the sight of God. As we trust in Him we have this great patron Jesus Christ the righteous and John says further “he is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world”. John could hardly speak of the way in which the Lord Jesus had met our case without going on to speak of the brightness and wonderful character of it. It is available to whosoever will, available to you and me tonight. May we trust in Him, and as trusting in Him may we go on as knowing Him as our patron Jesus Christ the righteous.

Gospel Preaching at Hampton on 17 July 2011

GOD'S DELIGHT IN FORGIVENESS

*If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?
But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

*Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and
with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from
all his iniquities.*

Psalm 130:3,4,7,8

There was a young man who was an atheist. The Spirit of God was obviously striving with him and he went into the church in St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square and he prayed this: 'God, if you're real put me in touch with somebody who knows you'. He came out of that church, crossed over the road and went into Charing Cross Station that was two minutes away. There a lady gave him a tract and he could see it was a tract. He told her what he had just prayed and she said to him: 'Well I'm the person that God wants you to meet'. She then told him about Jesus and how He had saved her, saved her from a very mixed-up life and background. This young man took the tract and said his train was going to leave and he ran off. But there you are! He prayed to God that if He was real He would put him in touch with somebody who knew Him and within a couple of minutes later that's exactly what happened. That's the God I know, a God who is anxious to bless you, anxious to bless the sinner, anxious to meet the need of whosoever will. He's been so anxious about that, you know, that He's provided the perfect righteous basis whereby a sinner can be forgiven.

There was another young man whose story comes to my mind. He had no interest in God. All he wanted to do was to live his own life. He got up to all sorts of mischief and one day he passed a book shop and in the window he saw a book that appeared to be about the devil. He thought: 'That's just the kind of book I want!' So he went in and he didn't look too closely at it but he bought it – a book about the devil. When he came to look at it more closely

he found out that it was a book about Christ and it just had an unusual title. But through reading it he came to know the Saviour. Yes, that's the God I know – a God who will even use interest in the devil to bring someone to knowledge of the Lord Jesus as their own personal Saviour.

That's the God I commend to you! But more than that, God commends His own love to you and He commends it by the very fact that He gave His only begotten Son. You see sin has brought in a distance between us and God and it's something that we by ourselves can do nothing about. Not only does the Bible tell us that we're all sinners but you know you're a sinner, you know there are things that you've done that you shouldn't have done and things perhaps that you should have done and haven't. The BBC conducted a survey one Easter and asked people about things they had done and wished they hadn't. A huge percentage of people responded to that survey coming up with all sorts of things from their lives. They wished they had done this or that better or they wished they had not got so angry about something and things like that. Whatever we think of ourselves the Bible is quite true that everyone has sinned and comes short of the glory of God. But the wonderful thing is that in that situation God has provided a Saviour for you and me – One whom we can trust with absolute assurance, One who invited all those who were weary and heavy laden to come to Him. You are perhaps weary and burdened with your sins but tonight there's a Saviour for you. It tells us here: "if thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" God knows about our iniquities and our sins – He's got them all written down but He is not holding these things against us tonight. He sent His only begotten Son. One thing that stands out in the life of Jesus and makes Him different from everybody else is that He was absolutely perfect.

There was never a sin, never an evil thought, very different from every one of us. The gospels don't tell us very much about the early life of our Lord Jesus. They just show us His birth and a few incidents up to His being twelve years old and then there was a

great gap. They tell us when at the age of thirty Jesus took up His public ministry there was a voice from heaven that said “This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight” (Matthew 3:17). There was absolute perfection in all those years. Marvellous! Think back to your own teenage years if you are beyond them and think of how you were as a young person. Jesus under the eye of God was absolutely perfect.

And if anything proves His sinlessness it is what happened to Him when He was taken and given a mockery of a trial when He endured the indignities and hatred of those persons around Him. They hit Him in the face; they spat upon Him, covered His face and said to Him “prophesy to us, Christ, Who is it who struck thee?” (Matthew 26:66). They scourged Him; they made a crown of thorns for Him. They heaped every kind of indignity on Him and what happened? What did Jesus do, what did He say? He said “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). What a proof that Jesus never even had an evil thought! I know if people did things like that to me I would be very angry. I would have hated them but the Lord Jesus had nothing of that. He says “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” – absolute perfection, absolute sinlessness and that had to be so because as suffering at Calvary’s cross He was going there as a perfect sacrifice. He offered Himself spotless to God.

In the words of Isaiah the prophet, God was going to lay upon Him the “iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). In that way the Lord Jesus was going to bear the judgment of God against sin so that there might be a way of righteous forgiveness for you and me, sinners though we are. Tonight that’s available to you. Whatever you’ve done, whatever may have entered into your life there’s a way of forgiveness because Jesus suffered “the just for the unjust” – Why? – “that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). You can come into a relationship with God tonight if only you’ll own up to the fact that you’re a sinner and tell the Lord Jesus in any words you like that you want Him to cleanse you from your sins and come into your life and to be your Saviour.

I was at the Imperial War Museum last Wednesday. I went there to have a look at some New Testaments that were issued during the First World War. They were called Active Service Testaments and they were produced by the Scripture Gift Mission. These little booklets had in the back of them a declaration which read something like this: ‘knowing that I am a sinner and that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died to save me and rose again I take Him as my personal Saviour and seek help to commend Him before men’. Some people signed them and put their names and their addresses in them. The researchers at the Imperial War Museum had looked through their collection of these Testaments and they got out all the ones that were signed so that I could have a look at them. There it is! People had signed up to say that they knew they were sinners and they had called on the Lord Jesus to save them. If you want to know God, if you want the forgiveness of sins and to have peace with God the same way is open to you.

God is not holding your sins against you. He knows all about them but the scripture says: “there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared”. That forgiveness is based on the finished perfect work of Christ when He suffered the just for the unjust, when He bore the judgment of God in all its awfulness. That’s what happened in the three hours of darkness when the Lord Jesus was forsaken of God. He did that so that He might be presented as a Saviour for you and me and “God commends *his* love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us” (Romans 5:8). God is commending His love to you tonight because He does love you. God loves you so much that “he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Would you like to believe today? Would you own up to the fact that you’re a sinner in need of a Saviour?

There’s plentiful forgiveness; it says here “but with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption”. The work of Christ is enough to meet the need of every sinner that comes to God through Him. There’s no sin that can put you at a distance

from the work of the Lord Jesus in its cleansing power. There's nothing that you can have done that cannot be met by that saving power of the blood of Jesus. God has given the witness to it that He's fully satisfied with what Jesus has done and that He has raised Him from the dead. Yea more than that, Christ has ascended into heaven and He sat down at "the right hand of the greatness on high". He's turned the greatest throne in the universe into a throne of blessing and from that throne He is administering blessing to whoever trusts in Him today. It's the greatest offer that you'll ever find in your life!

The most important thing that you'll ever need to do is to get right with God because unless you do the prospect is very awful – you will come under the judgment of God, the same character of judgment as was borne by Jesus. Jesus bore that judgment so that there might be a way of blessing for you and today the door to it is wide open. The only thing that may stop you coming into God's loving favour and forgiveness is your own unwillingness to own up to the fact that you're a sinner and to trust in Christ. He is certainly available for you as the Saviour.

There is a story that the Lord Jesus told in the gospels, that we sometimes call the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). It's one of the most famous Bible stories. Charles Dickens apparently described it as the greatest short story that had ever been written, but it's much more than that. It's a story that Jesus told to show how a sinner coming to God will be received. It tells us what happened to a younger son who went away to a far country and got into all kinds of disobedience and debauchery and all kinds of evil. He then could not help himself and he made up his mind to go back to his father and say "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son". As soon as the son had come to that conclusion he set off for home. His father began running to meet him. Somebody once said that the only time God is in a hurry is when He wants to bless the sinner. If you are a repentant sinner you can rely on that tonight. If you feel the slightest movement of your heart towards

God, that you want to be forgiven, that you want to have Christ as your own Saviour, you can be quite sure that as soon as you wish to turn to Him He will be there to fill your heart with blessing. It says in that story “the father said to his bondmen, Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead and has come to life, was lost and has been found”. That little story shows the wonderful way that God delights and is perfectly righteous in receiving the sinner who believes in Jesus. Tonight there is a Saviour for you! Will you trust Him? Will you own up to the fact that you’re a sinner and that you need Christ? It is the most important decision you will ever make. You can make it now while you are on your seat. May you do so for His name’s sake.

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