

Remember Jesus Christ Raised From Among The Dead (7) (Some thoughts on 2 Timothy 2)

—A. E. Bouter

We come now to the last of the seven ways in which Paul refers to his beloved child, Timothy, while teaching and encouraging him (and us): "Bondman of [the' Lord" (2:24). This seems to me to be the climax of this series. We have learned that Paul's main exercise was to promote God's interests in a day of ruin and opposition. In order to have the features of our Lord Jesus reproduced in Timothy, in following generations, and in us, he gives advice, instruction, encouragement, and exhortation by means of several metaphors.

A Bondman

So far, Paul referred to commonly used figures — child, soldier, athlete, farmer, workman, vessel — but now he uses the Old-Testament expression which speaks of the Lord Himself: "bondman." It suggests that, just as the Lord Jesus has been the perfect Bondman of Jehovah, so Timothy should now be a bondman of the Lord. There is no article in the Greek before "bondman" (slave, servant); the KJV fails to show this. There is no article before "Lord" either, and this seems to confirm that it is a reference to the Old Testament, especially to the four great prophecies in Isaiah about "the Servant of Jehovah" (Isa. 42; 49; 50; 52; 53). In the light of this we also may refer to other well-known passages such as Exodus 21:1-6 and Philippians 2. May the qualities which He displayed in a perfect way also be formed and worked out in you and me!

Paul often applies "the things which are true in Him" to himself and to the Christians, showing them to be "true in us." When we compare Isaiah 49:6 with Acts 13:47 and Isaiah 52:7 with Romans 10:15, we can see this. Similarly, Paul applies certain thoughts about the Servant of the Lord to Timothy. This we conclude after comparing Matthew 12:19f with 2 Timothy 2:24f.

Why a bondman?

Christians have been brought into higher and more intimate relationships with God than any Old-Testament believers ever enjoyed. We are, for example, children of God, adopted sons, companions of the Anointed Son of God, and called "His brethren." Still, it remains true that we are also seen as bondmen, first of God, who is our sovereign Master, and secondly of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has bought us with the price of His blood. The apostle Paul uses the expressions "bondman" and "to serve" (as a bondman), and similar ones more than any New-Testament author.

Paul and the other writers of the epistles present themselves as bondmen of God and of the Lord Jesus. They also consider the saints as their fellow-bondmen (see e.g., Rom. 1:1ff; Phil. 1:1; Jas. 1:1). They count it a privilege to be in the school of Him who has taken the form of a bondman and to learn from Him (Phil. 2). Delivered from the bondage of sin, Satan, and death, they have been set free to serve as servant-sons, in a relationship of love. They realize that the rights of the Beloved and of God are rejected in the scene where He has left us. We too may count it a great privilege to represent Him here. Let us look at some features of a bondman of the Lord.

He serves the right cause, the right Master

Having his ear opened for instruction and direction from his Master, a bondservant of the Lord learns that he should avoid getting involved in controversies and conflicts. These would only promote the interests of a false "master," who always tries to oppose the rightful Master. Satan hides himself behind "the religious man," and behind many "well-meaning people." He does not hesitate to use professing, and even born-again Christians as his servants (without their even realising this). He seeks to make them busy with vain efforts for useless and, therefore, wrong causes. Thus occupied with all kinds of things, a Christian — convinced he is working for a good cause — becomes unprofitable for the work his Master has for him. So let us be careful not to fall into this trap, but let us take care to be useful servants, like Onesimus and Mark, for the good cause (4:7).

He is mature and formed in God's school

In comparing 2:23 with 1 Timothy 6:4 and Titus 3:9f, we see that Paul refers to the Judaising teachers (see also 1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; 6:20). A note in the JND translation says about "foolish and senseless questioning": "In general a mind not subject to God, a man following his own mind and will." The word "foolish" makes me think of the many references in Proverbs to the fool, and to the wise son who, taught in God's school by God's Wisdom, would avoid these foolish questionings. "Senseless" or "undisciplined" indicates a lack of spiritual formation. These spiritually ignorant and immature, Judaising teachers kept others in bondage (see e.g., Gal. 4:1-10). We meet them in many circles today.

The article (in the Greek) before "questionings" would suggest that Paul refers to well-known, often-used arguments or statements. These often come as questions, which the enemy would use to draw the attention away from real spiritual instruction. They tend to create unrest, strife, and contentions. However, Timothy would avoid these disputes, "knowing that they beget contentions." As God uses love to further His interests, so Satan uses certain methods to prevent the furtherance of God's work, with the ultimate aim to destroy it. As a good pupil of Paul's (2 Cor. 2:11), Timothy would know how to avoid discussions that would beget contentions "to the subversion of the hearers."

He is gentle towards all; apt to teach

The bondman ought not to contend; it behooves him not to be characterized by fighting, but by being gentle towards all. Paul himself had given this example (see 1 Th. 2:7). We think here again of the true Servant of the Lord, of whom we read how gentle and meek He was (Isa. 42:2; 53:7; Zech. 9:9; Mt. 11:29; 21:5; 1 Pet. 2:21-24). Gentleness is a moral qualification necessary for teaching others. It is the attitude found in "the little child" of Matthew 18:1-6, and the prerequisite to realize God's principles in the kingdom and in the local assembly. Secondly, the bondman needs to be "apt to teach" (only used here and in 1 Tim. 3:2). He must possess a clear quality for teaching, presupposing spiritual intelligence and implying the ability to convey the truth to others. Thirdly, the word "forbearing" (only used here in the New Testament), which means "bearing evil without resentment," has to do with a personal quality of bearing injustices without seeking revenge.

He is in meekness setting right those who oppose

Again we find here a clear reference to our Lord Jesus, who could say "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Mt. 11:29). What a privilege to walk with Him under the same yoke! (see also Mt. 28:20). The servant should be characterized by the same attitude as the Master. The Greek preposition, used in the expression "in meekness" (2:25), gives it the sense of "characterized by meekness" or "governed by meekness." "Setting right" is closely related to "instruction in righteousness" (3:16) and is the opposite of what the Judaising teachers were (uninstructed, undisciplined, 2:23). The *way in which* ("in meekness") Timothy had to do this was as important as *what* he should do. May we refer again to our Lord (Mt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1) and to Paul (1 Cor. 4:21)? We are often exhorted to display this meekness: Matthew 5:5 gives the blessedness of those who are characterized by it, (though this verse has a slightly different word in the Greek); in Galatians 5:23, it is a part of the fruit of the Spirit; in Ephesians 4:2, it is essential for the keeping of the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace; in Colossians 3:12, to display the *new man*; in 1 Timothy 6:11, to be a true "man of God"; and finally in Titus 3:2 again as general exhortation to all. This feature of spiritual maturity is indispensable when correcting others (Gal. 6:1). Such meekness counts with and relies on God's mighty resources and is confident that the Lord will provide in a situation where all seems hopeless. This last point, expressed in 2:25f, also shows that the real warfare is between God and the devil. Timothy had the privilege to be used by God, as a bondman of the Lord, to bring these opponents to their senses and to deliver them from the snare.

The effects of such a ministry

Through God's gracious intervention, using Timothy's attitude and efforts, some opponents might come to repentance. Of course, they themselves are fully responsible for their actions (cf. Acts 13:48 and 14:1). These verses might suggest a first-time repentance in self-judgment and an initial turning to God. They also might indicate a spiritual renewal, taking a low place before God, by those who are true Christians (2 Cor. 12:21; Rev. 2:5) so that they may be brought to a full knowledge or acknowledgment of the truth they had lost under the influence of false teachers (2:18). This is neither mere intellectual knowledge, nor just objective knowledge or mysticism. It is knowledge of the truth.

Today there is so much "knowledge" in relation to all kinds of things, except of the truth. In verse 26 we see the proposed

effect of the ministry Paul entrusts to Timothy. It would awaken the opponents, bringing them back to spiritual soberness and delivering them out of the snare of the devil (see also 1 Tim. 3:7), in which they had fallen through self-will, spiritual pride, and hardening.

The objective of such a ministry

Following the preference expressed in a note of J. N. Darby regarding verse 26,¹ I would suggest that Timothy's ministry would take the opponents captive — an inward change taking place at the same time — in order to bring them back to do the will of God. This would fit in with "the Servant of [the] Lord," of whom we read that it was His food to do God's will. We have seven references to the will of God in John's Gospel in relation to our blessed Lord. Timothy, as a follower and representative of the true Servant, as a humble servant himself, would bring these people to the same attitude. Repentant, they would be willing (for the first time, or renewed) to be God's captives as it were, and do His will. Thus they would become practical followers of the Bondman of all bondmen, and magnify God in their bodies, as willing and useful slaves. There is nothing sensational about this, in the sense that the newspapers would write about it, but what a triumph for God and for our Lord Jesus!

Conclusion: the study and practice of God's will

Doing this would keep us from falling into the devil's snare. In a day in which the Word of truth and the will of God are being questioned and rejected, it is good for "the man of God" to feed on the Word of God, in order to discern and practice the will of God (3:16f). God's will and our obedience go hand in hand, and thus the devil's efforts go in this direction. He will try to make us less sensitive in relation to God's revealed will, by promoting our self-will, cultivating self-interest, pride, self-realization; or by using "beautiful" theological theories, philosophical systems (Col. 2) and the like. Almost all the epistles in the New Testament answer one or more attacks of the enemy to take us captive for himself. But by submitting to God's will as revealed in the Scriptures, we are willing captives for Him (cf. also Eph. 4:8ff). May our food be to do God's will, as we may learn from our blessed Lord!

A few examples concerning the will of God

The whole conflict creation versus evolution has to do with submission to God's will as Creator, with obedience to the will of God revealed in His Word. Our daily walk as redeemed people is to be in submission to His rights as Redeemer (1 Cor. 6:19). With regard to the place of the woman, Paul refers back to the basic principles of creation, the fall and redemption (1 Cor. 11; 1 Tim. 2). As subjects in the kingdom of God, we are taught to be exercised to do His will (Mt. 5-7). As disciples of the King, we belong to a company characterized by doing the will of the Father (Mt. 12:50). Romans shows first God's way of bringing individual sinners into subjection to the will of God (ch. 1-8). Then it explains how they should use their bodies as members of the Assembly of God by practising the will of God (ch. 12-16). In 1 Corinthians we read about the will of God in relation to the local assembly. Paul's life is an example to the believer, showing the will of God concerning the call, walk, experiences, and destination of the Christian. In Ephesians we hear about God's will concerning His (eternal) counsels.

Many New Testament passages refer to the will of God in our daily lives (e.g., Rom. 12:1-3; 15:32; Eph. 5:17; 6:6; Col. 1:9; 4:12; 1 Th. 4:3 — practical sanctification; 5:18 — giving thanks to God; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 2:15; 3:17; 4:19 — sufferings; 1 Jn. 5:14 — prayer according to His will). You may remember that we mentioned God's will in the introduction of these series as one of our resources.

We like to finish with a verse that sums up all the instructions of 2 Timothy 2 and characterizes the overcomer in a day of ruin: "And the world is passing, and its lust, but he that does the will of God abides for eternity" (1 Jn. 2:17).

The End

The Prophecy of Amos (1)

¹ In a note to this verse Darby says the following: *It is here a question whether it be God's will or Satan's; whether 'for' (eis) refers to 'awake up' or 'taken captive': 'awake up for his (God's) will out of the snare,' &c.; that those who have been taken as prey by the devil may, God having given them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, awake up to follow his will. I rather prefer the application to God.*

Introduction

Amos prophesied during the rule of Uzziah (also called Azariah), king of Judah, who reigned fifty two years at Jerusalem (2 Chr. 26:3), and during the rule of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, who reigned forty one years at Samaria. Only one king, Manasseh, king of Judah, reigned longer than these, namely fifty five years. A long reign, however, does not mean that it meets with God's approval. Manasseh's reign was one continuous chain of sin and unrighteousness.

Uzziah, the king of Judah, did what was right in the eyes of the Lord (2 Ki. 15:3). His reign was very prosperous, the realm was greatly strengthened, until the day on which this king, driven by pride, wanted to perform priestly service in the temple. As punishment for this he became leprous until his death. Of the kings that came after him, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah, walked in the ways of the Lord. Through the faithfulness of these true sons of David, the judgment that threatened to come over Judah — in part because of the godless kings Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon — was postponed.

It was an entirely different story with Jeroboam II. Though he did mighty deeds in the eyes of men, he was characterized by doing "evil in the sight of the Lord." Yet, it pleased God to use him to save Israel. The Lord had, as yet, not said that He would eradicate the name of the ten-tribe nation Israel from under the heavens (2 Ki. 14:23-29). After the death of Jeroboam II and the reign of six kings who followed him, reigning together for forty one years and seven months, this ten-tribe nation did completely disappear through the exile to Assyria.

The reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and that of Jeroboam II, the king of Israel, coincided for fourteen years. Yet, Amos did not prophesy during these fourteen years. The first verse of chapter one says that he prophesied two years before the earthquake.

Chapter 1

Concerning Amos' call we have the remarkable expression that he has *seen* the words of the Lord. These words are also used at the call of other prophets. The words of the Lord were not only heard by them, but they also saw the contents and significance of these words.

Amos came from Tekoah, a town in Judah. As so many other towns, Tekoah had been fortified by king Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, after the separation of the ten tribes. At one time, king Jehoshaphat had won the victory over Moab, Edom, and Ammon in the wilderness of Tekoah (2 Chr. 20:20). The memory of this victory may well have stood before Amos who announced the judgment over these three nations.

Tekoah lay sixteen kilometers (10 miles) from Jerusalem, eight kilometers south of Bethlehem, in the middle of the land of Judah and Benjamin. The mountain Beth-haccerem, which rises near Tekoah, was a watch post. By fire on the mountain the approach of an enemy was announced (Jer. 6:1). Amos lived at Tekoah, on the mountain Beth-haccerem. From there he saw in spirit the enemies below him who had penetrated farther and farther into the terrain of the two tribes. He prophesied what would happen to these enemies. Subsequently he was sent to Bethel to prophesy against Ephraim, the ten-tribe nation.

Amos was *among the herdsmen at Tekoah*. In his prophecy we find repeatedly types derived from his occupation, from his flock of sheep, from the fights of shepherds with wild animals. We are not told of a specific call of Amos, he simply speaks the words that he has seen. Yet, in choosing as prophet one who raises sheep, the Holy Spirit shows very clearly His sovereignty. God called David from after the sheep and made him king over His people. Moses tended the sheep of his father-in-law, and the Lord called him to lead Israel through the wilderness, appointing him as mediator of the covenant with His people, and making His holy law known through him. Later the Lord Jesus chose simple fishermen as His apostles. According to the Sanhedrin, they were "unlettered and unlearned men" — the appraisal of proud intellect. What did these very learned councilors understand of an inspiration by the Holy Spirit? *This same Spirit made the shepherd Amos to be a prophet of Israel.*

This surely is a clear deviation from the *human arrogance* that wants to set requirements for the exercise of the service that God desires to give among His people. Amos himself points out clearly that he was neither prophet nor a son of the prophets, but a mere herdsman who gathered sycamore figs (7:14). He was a prophet neither by natural ability nor by birth.

Through the attitude of the leaders and the people in Israel and Judah, the service of the prophets had not been accepted, not even that of Elijah, the restorer of the law. Exceptional circumstances lead to exceptional provisions. For instance, during the sad decline in the days of the judges, there was no *man* of character left in Israel. Then the Lord took a woman, Deborah, and entrusted to her a place of public activity. Now it pleased the Lord to speak to the nation through a simple herdsman. Of course, the official leaders objected to this, as did Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (7:10). Still, God maintains His sovereign right to use those instruments He chooses; He will not let Himself be confined within bounds set by the intellect.

The prophecy of Amos directs itself mainly at *Israel, the ten-tribe nation*, which, from a *spiritual* perspective, represented the entire nation. At times also, he addresses all twelve tribes. Generally, however, the two tribes are the separate subject of God's judgments, since Judah displayed the same traits of unfaithfulness, though it possessed greater privileges than the ten tribes.

For the ten tribes, the time of judgment had come near. In Amos' prophecy the cause of the judgment is more the *moral and religious condition* of the people than the particular sins and trespasses, although these are also mentioned. The same judgment was announced by Hosea, the contemporary and successor of Amos.

The earthquake is a remarkable time indicator in Amos' prophecy. The prophet did not announce the earthquake, but it was for him a *symbol* of the judgment that would soon come over the nation. This event he *applies morally* and he borrows many images from this phenomenon. For instance, he compares the rumbling of the earth with the creaking of a wagon loaded heavily with sheaves in harvest time. The fastest man would not be able to escape. The horns of the altar would be cut off, houses and palaces overturned, walls would rent, and the defenders would be thrown out through the breaches in the walls. It would be an overthrow as that of Sodom and Gomorrah (4:11). Through this earthquake the sea would flow over the land. The earth would rise and fall as the water of the Nile that also rises and falls in one season. Through the surge of the water, the width of the river would nearly be doubled. But there would also come a day of restoration and rebuilding.

The earthquake in the days of king Uzziah is also mentioned by the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 14:5). He compares its results with that of the appearing of the Son of man. Then the Mount of Olives will split to enable the faithful remnant to escape the power of the King of the North, the prophetic Assyrian. In Amos' prophecy the earthquake is a type of the imminent judgments, not those of the distant future. In Zechariah's prophecy the earthquake does not only speak of judgment but it is also a promise of deliverance, of salvation.

In other places in Scripture an earthquake is only a sign of salvation. Take for instance the one after the death of the Lord Jesus upon the cross, by which the graves were opened and many saints who slept were raised. The salvation then consisted of the revelation that the power of death had been abolished through the death of Christ (Mt. 27:51-52). Also the earthquake at the descent of the angel who rolled away the stone from the Lord's tomb was a sign of salvation. The empty grave gave proof that the Lord was risen (Mt. 28:2). Through an earthquake, Paul and Silas were delivered from the prison at Philippi, and it brought about the salvation of the jailor (Acts 16:26-34).

Amos said: "Jehovah roareth from Zion, and uttereth His voice from Jerusalem; and the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withereth." The expression: "Jehovah roareth from Zion" is very important and characterizes the entire prophecy of Amos. He presents the Lord as "the Lion out of the tribe of Judah," that roars because he has a prey that he will devour (cf. 3:4). The prophet already hears this roaring, as it were, for the judgments he announces over the nations, and afterward over Judah — the two tribes — and over Ephraim — the ten tribes — were near indeed. His words, however, are restricted to disasters that would come over the nations, Judah, and Ephraim. He showed the cause of these disasters, which were to be executed by the kings of Egypt, Assyria, and Babel, whom the Lord used as disciplinary rods.

It is very important to realize that the disasters, wars, announced by Amos are not the judgments of the last days. All Amos' prophecies have already been fulfilled, they are already history, except for those mentioned in the last chapter verses 11-15. This special character of Amos must not be lost sight of if one wants to avoid confusion. *For it is just as in our days. If all that we see happening in this world even now — for instance the terrors of two world wars — is not yet the end; then how terrible will the end be?*

Thus the result of the Lord's roaring in Amos' prophecy is that the pastures of the shepherds mourn and the top of Carmel withers. In other words, through war activity many pastures would be lost. When such calamities come over a nation, peaceful activities can no longer take place, and fertile grounds and strong cities are destroyed.

Jeremiah speaks in the same sense. Upon the command of the Lord, Jeremiah gave the cup filled with the wrath of the Lord into the hands of, among others, the nations mentioned by Amos (Jer. 25:15-29). Then he speaks of the "roaring" of

the Lord from His holy dwelling place, just as Amos does, and about the results of it: the crying and lamenting of the shepherds because precious pastures are destroyed by the burning wrath of the Lord (Jer. 25:30-38). The prophecy of Jeremiah has therefore much in common with that of Amos.

To be cont'd

John, The Beloved Disciple

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Introduction

John's character and calling

Three of the twelve disciples, Peter, James and John, were especially privileged. They were among the first disciples and were called by the Lord to have a special place with Him. The Lord allowed them to follow Him into the house of Jairus, He took them with Him on the mount of transfiguration, and answered their questions with a discourse on the last days. These three witnessed special events. James and John were brothers, sons of Zebedee, whom the Lord called "Boanerges," meaning: "Sons of Thunder" (Mk. 3:17), which tells us something about their character. Always ready to defend their Master's honour, they were even prepared to call fire down from heaven on the Samaritans who did not want to receive Jesus (Lk. 9:49,54). Apparently, they had strong, ambitious characters. This is evident from their wish to occupy the first places on the right and left hand of the Lord once the Kingdom would be revealed in glory (Mt. 20:21; Mk. 10:35-37). These incidents do not exactly arouse our sympathy for the character of John. The meaning of his name — "the Lord is gracious" or "the Lord has shown grace" — seems a complete contradiction of his character as a Son of thunder. Yet, the Lord loved him and taught him in the school of grace. It is safe to assume that the beloved disciple changed in the Lord's presence. His eyes must have opened more and more to the greatness of God's grace and love as these were so uniquely brought to light in the Son of God's love (Jn. 1:14-18; 3:16).

Among these three disciples whom the Lord took aside so often, John enjoyed a very special place as the Lord's confidant. Thus this beloved disciple is a model for all who follow the Lord. All have to learn from Him to become meek and humble and to display a disposition totally different from our natural one.

The love of Christ for His own

Let us, therefore, reflect on this beloved disciple who always keeps a low profile, and here — and also elsewhere — simply calls himself the disciple whom the Lord loved (cf. Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). What Scripture says of John, is in principle true of each follower of the Lord. All of us are objects of the love of Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. Although this love reaches out to all His own, it is also very personal indeed. Paul could say that he lived by: "the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). So in this sense we are all disciples who are loved by Jesus. However, practice shows that we need a certain spiritual growth to be able to speak about our relationship with the Lord in this way. We must learn to keep a low profile and to efface ourselves and our own weak love for Him. In doing so, we shall discover more and more of His abundant love for us. The only thing that really counts is His love for us, for our love for Him is imperfect and changeable, while His love for us is stable and unchangeable. We may rejoice in this love — "I am my beloved's, and His desire is toward me" (Song 7:10). His desire and His love are toward us in spite of what we are.

In the light of this Divine love, everything else becomes insignificant. In this respect it is also good to observe that the Greek word "*agapao*" is used for the love of the Lord for John. This word always indicates Divine love, which originates in God Himself rather than in something attractive in us. God loves us because He is love. The same thing can be said of the love of the Lord Jesus for His own. Christ has shown the full extent of this love when He loved His own to the end (Jn. 13:1). In spite of the lack of understanding from the side of the disciples, He persevered in His love, fully proving it by delivering Himself up into death on the cross. In the Gospel of John there are five instances where John is called the disciple whom Jesus loved. In only one of them (Jn. 20:2), the Greek word "*phileo*," which indicates "attachment," "affection," is used. The Lord was indeed attached to this beloved disciple. The contrast between Peter and John in each of these scriptures is noteworthy, since it accentuates all the more the unique position of John.

In the upper room

John 13 brings us to the upper room, where the Lord washed the feet of His disciples and celebrated the Passover with them. Here we have Peter's impulsive and impetuous behaviour — as well as the utterly sad betrayal of Judas — contrasted with the worthiness and peace of John's reclining "on Jesus' breast" (v. 23). This shows that John took a place of honour at the Lord's right side. He reclined in the presence of the Lord, in the place of trust and intimacy (cf. Jn. 1:18). The Lord Jesus Himself, as the eternal Son in the bosom of the Father, could reveal Him. Now just as the Son is the object of the Father's love, the disciple is the object of the Lord's love (see also Jn. 17:26). We too can enjoy a place with Him, very close to His heart, just like John. It will mark our lives, for the awareness of the love of the Lord gives us peace and understanding. Thus John could remain calm amidst the turmoil caused by the Lord's remark that one of His disciples was going to betray Him. Besides, John was in a better position than Peter to ask the Lord of which one He spoke, and to gain insight into this difficult situation.

John 13, by the way, is a chapter of big contrasts. The love of Christ causes Him to take the place of a slave among His disciples, thus correcting their selfishness and self-love. The light of Christ reveals Judas' heart of darkness, and he disappears into the night ("and it was night," v. 30). In Peter we see the impetuosity and, later, the weakness of the flesh; in Judas we see its utter corruption. Peter does not understand the Lord, and is unable to follow Him on the path of suffering. Judas cannot be brought to repentance and becomes a pawn in the hands of Satan. In the midst of this disarray, just before His suffering, we see how Jesus quietly reclines at table to eat and speak with His disciples. John, the beloved disciple, shares this peace, and feels happy in the Lord's presence. Although the suffering is casting its shadows, nothing can disturb his peaceful fellowship with the Lord.

The place occupied by John in the presence of the Lord is an illustration of our own position. In the midst of a hostile world that has rejected Christ, we have a place in His presence separated from the world and lifted up above the turmoil of our circumstances. There we are with Him in "the upper room," enjoying an undisturbed fellowship with Him, while He gives us peace and insight into His thoughts. Just as John enjoyed peace and received insight into the Lord's thoughts, so fellowship with Christ gives us true peace and knowledge of God's thoughts. As beloved disciples, we know that we have a better part than this world — a part with the Lord in heaven (Jn. 13:1, 8).

The washing of the feet is a prerequisite for having part with the Lord as His disciples. This washing is an illustration of the cleansing work of the Word of God (cf. Eph. 5:26). It is necessary to be cleansed of that which defiles us on earth if we wish to have fellowship with the Lord and to know ourselves linked with Him in the place that He now occupies with the Father. Beside the one-time, complete washing that we receive in the new birth (Jn. 13:10), we find three examples in Scripture of continuous, repeated cleansing. The washing of the feet as we have it here is necessary for having part with the heavenly Lord and for reclining at the table with Him. To stand as priests in the sanctuary, we must wash our hands and feet at the laver in the court, like the sons of Aaron (Ex. 30:17-21). This means that, before entering God's presence with our sacrifices of praise and worship, we need to submit all our doings and dealings to the cleansing work of the Word of God. If as believers we want to walk the pathway to our heavenly home in separation from evil, we need purifying water, just as the Israelites in the desert (See Num. 19). So let us be convinced of the necessity of being cleansed by the water of the Word, and willingly submit ourselves to it, for as the Lord said: "Unless I wash thee, thou hast not part with Me" (Jn. 13:8).

To be cont'd

Outline for Bible Study (55)

111. The Wedding At Cana. Nicodemus. —John 2:1-12; 3:1-21.

Outline

1. The lack of wine at the wedding feast Jn. 2:1-5
2. The miraculous help Jn. 2:6-11
3. The necessity of being born again Jn. 3:1-8
4. How this takes place Jn. 3:9-16

Explanation

1. The Lord, who had been invited as a guest, soon made Himself known as the source of joy and the true Lord of the feast. The word "woman" was not demeaning (cf. Jn. 19:26; 20:13); the Lord loved His mother, as was clearly evident at the cross.

2. The three days in John 1 and 2 have prophetic significance. On the first morrow John the Baptist testified first of the effect of the Lord's *work*, and then of His *person* (1:19-38). Christ is the gathering point for His own. It speaks of the Church period. On the second morrow, we see the remnant of Israel in Nathanael under the fig tree. The third day is the wedding with the wine, pictures of the coming Kingdom of the Lord Jesus and the joy on earth. It shall be the "best wine," because the world has never experienced such a glorious and happy time before. (Cf. Isa. 12; 35:6,10; 54:7-14; Ps. 97:1; 98; 99; 100; Zeph. 3:14-17). The vessels held a total of about 600 litres.

Today is still the time of waiting for the Lord Jesus. His Word concerning His Kingdom and the revelation of His glory remains: "Mine hour has not yet come." But it is at hand (Rev. 19:11ff; 20:6; 21:9-27; Col. 3:4; 2 Th. 1:10). The believers must still wait for their Lord (Rev. 1:9; 3:10; 2 Th. 3:3-5).

3. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews and belonged to the Sanhedrin (Jn. 7:50). He came to Jesus at night, because he knew the enmity of the world against the Lord (Jn. 15:19). He saw in Him only a teacher approved of God. The Lord told him that to enter the kingdom of God, he needed to have a new nature (to be born again).

4. The new birth is through "Water and Spirit." Water is symbolic of God's Word (Jn. 13:10; 15:3; Eph. 5:26; 1 Pet. 1:23), which convicts of sin, and the Holy Spirit brings about repentance by giving a new nature, thereby forming a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Nicodemus should have known about the necessity of a new nature (Ezek. 36:25-27). Even for entering the earthly kingdom a new heart is needed, how much more for the heavenly! (Jn. 6:12). For this, Christ had to die (Jn. 3:14-16).

Lesson

The host must have been God-fearing, expecting the Consolation of Israel. The Lord graciously enters into the joy with those who rejoice. The action and answer of the Lord showed that His work and glory as Son of God far exceeded His duty as a son of Mary. He waited in dependence upon His Father when the source of joy, was lacking.

To be born of water does not refer to baptism, for there water speaks of the death and judgment of the old man (Rom. 6:4).

112. The Samaritan Woman. — John 4:1-42.

Outline

1. Living water Jn. 4:1-15
2. Jesus reveals Himself as the Messiah Jn. 4:16-27
3. The Saviour of the world Jn. 4:28-42

Explanation

1. Enmity of the Jews prompted the Lord to work outside Israel, this the disciples were not allowed to do (Mt. 10:5) as long as Israel was not yet set aside, but the Lord could. To show grace to a poor sinner, the Lord went north through Samaria, rather than via the usual route, east of the Jordan. The Lord, suffering as all mankind, was wearied and took a needed rest at Jacob's well, depending on a woman for a drink. In the heat of the day — the sixth hour is twelve noon — when most people stayed home, the Lord met this woman, who avoided the company of others. He spoke to her about "the gift of God." She sought relief from troubles in this life, but the Lord created in her the desire for the living water, the new life, through God's Word and Spirit (cf. Jn. 7:38, 39).

2. To make her aware of her need, the Lord addressed her conscience (v. 16) by drawing attention to her sinful lifestyle.

Yet, though sinful, she was religious and changed the subject to worshipping, seeking to cover up by a display of piety. The Lord rejects such self-willed religion, for God looks for true worshippers. When she spoke about the coming Messiah of Israel, the Lord revealed to her that He was the One. She believed Him and was saved (Lk. 19:10).

3. The woman left her water pot behind and, forgetting her background, she brought others this good news. Many believed; they too, recognized that Jesus was indeed the Saviour! (Jn. 7:38; Ps. 42:1, 2).

Lesson

Grace searched for a subject in which it could glorify itself.

The Jews had a form of worship (the offering of incense), but not "true worship." Only the saved sinner, who knows God's grace, can worship in truth.

It was food for the Lord to do the will of God (v. 32-34), from the beginning (Heb. 10:7) to the end (Mt. 26:39).

To be cont'd

Questions and Answers

Question: I read in the Bible (Heb. 7:1-28) about Melchisedec, the king of Salem, the priest of the Most High God, who had no father or mother. Who was this man and where did he come from?

Answer: This is a very helpful account in God's Word. The apostle (probably Paul) teaches us here something about the Lord Jesus. While doing so, he also teaches us something about the way the Old-Testament stories speak to us of spiritual things. First let us look at the account of Melchisedec in Genesis 14:18-20.

Abram had just returned from the battle in which he had successfully freed his nephew Lot. Then we read, "And Melchisedec king of Salem brought out bread and wine. And he was priest of the Most High God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heavens and earth. And blessed be the Most High God, who has delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he [Abram] gave him [Melchisedec] the tenth of all."

That is all we read about this man, apart from what David writes in Psalm 110. There he says of the Messiah, "Thou art priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." It is clear from this Psalm that this man was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can be sure that Melchisedec had a father and mother, as well as forefathers. The only thing is, we do not read anything about these. In the Bible he comes suddenly into the picture. We are told nothing of his circumstances, only that he was a priest of the Most High God, the same God, who had appeared to Abraham. After Noah there must have been several that continued to serve God who had brought their fathers through the Flood, but we do not read of them. Only Abram is mentioned as believing God, until we suddenly hear of this priest. God did this because in this way Melchisedec became a picture of the Lord Jesus.

Our Lord really had no genealogy, for He was from everlasting. God simply brings Him into this world and He is immediately declared priest by God. God, who knew all things, wanted a picture that we could understand, and so God had long before caused Moses to record the appearance of Melchisedec in this particular way. Purposely God did not tell us anything more about him so that he could serve as a true picture of Christ.

The apostle explains that this priest was of another order than Aaron. So was our Lord (Heb. 7). On earth the Lord could never be priest, for He was not of the lineage of Aaron. God would, however, bring in another line of priesthood, just as Melchisedec had been of another lineage than Aaron (Heb. 8:4). Abram was blessed by, and gave tithes to Melchisedec, which shows that Melchisedec's priesthood was higher than that of Aaron (Heb. 7:6-7), who descended from Abraham. This had to be so if he was to be a good picture of our Lord. So you see that in all details, that which is recorded of this normal man, fits in picture form that which we know to be true of the Lord Jesus.

This helps us also in reading other Old-Testament stories. We realize that the way things are recorded has a spiritual purpose. Although we must be careful not to become fanciful in our interpretations, we may, nevertheless, glean spiritual lessons from the histories of the Old-Testament men and women.

Question: In what way is Abraham our father?

Answer: Today we refer to some scientists as the father of a certain procedure. For instance, Louis Pasteur is known as the father of the process of pasteurization, by which a liquid — milk for instance — is heated sufficiently to kill harmful bacteria, without bringing it to a boil. The process even carries Pasteur's name. So Abraham is called the Father of the Faithful, because he is the first of whom it is recorded that he had a great faith in God (Rom. 4:11-12). In Hebrews 11 we read how he considered God able to raise Isaac from the dead, although no one had ever been brought back to life before. His faith was the first recorded and it is the greatest as well. Therefore, the Bible speaks of him as the father of all believers, both of the Old and of the New Testament, and of both Jewish and Gentile believers.

In a literal, natural sense Abraham is the father of today's Jews and Arabs. The Jews are the natural descendants via Isaac and Jacob. The Arabs are Abraham's natural descendants via Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar (Gen. 16:15); or via Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, or Ishbak, Abraham's sons by Keturah (Gen. 25:1-4); or via Esau, who was Isaac's second son (Gen. 25:25). This natural descent from Abraham has no value for one's salvation. Yet, God still counts with the natural descendants of Abraham as well. The Jews have inherited the blessings God gave to Abraham, and God will, in a later day, bring a remnant from them to believe in God. At that time God will cause all Israelites who don't believe in Him to die, and to those who believe He will give all the blessings of Abraham (Rom. 11:26).