

God's Remedy for Our Problems
Reflections on 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:1

—J. Redekop

The two epistles of Paul to the Corinthians are wilderness epistles. The saints are viewed as having been set apart from this world by a divine call (1 Cor. 1:3). This world, which to the eye of faith has become a wilderness, furnishes nothing to sustain that faith. And the Christian passing through this world must live a life of complete dependence and obedience to the Lord. Failure to do so is the root cause of all the break-ups and break-downs in the family as well as in the assembly testimony.

God allows this time of testing in the wilderness in order that we might learn what is in our hearts. But what is of much greater value is to learn what is in the heart of God, and that is Christ. Then, as we learn this, we turn away from ourselves to find in Christ what answers to every need.

Carnality — the root of our problems

In reflecting on this portion of Scripture we must bear in mind the great object the apostle had before him. He longed to see the Corinthian saints lifted up out of their low spiritual condition as he had described it in the first epistle. Please note 1 Corinthians 3:1, "And I brethren could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal." This their carnal condition had led to worldliness and moral laxity, which further opened the door to assembly disorder and doctrinal error. And this left them with little spiritual discernment and no spiritual strength to cope with their problems. This is much of what we are facing today.

This condition, exposed in the first epistle, is addressed in the second epistle in order to show us God's way of transforming us into the moral likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. As this is being accomplished by the Spirit working out in us subjectively what God has purposed for us objectively in Christ, problems are solved in a God honouring way. Self is set aside in all its varied forms, and in its place Christ is seen in all His moral beauty.

It is not the intent to be occupied with difficulties and problems, but to see God's remedy for them. That does not mean that we try to avoid the problems, nor try to escape them, for we all know that none of us can run away from them. But rather to see God's provision to meet every need; and that provision is in Christ.

Change is possible

The apostle Paul himself had been in such stressful situations as are expressed in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9; 4:8-9, "Pressed out of measure, above strength... despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves." In spite of these outward dangers, Paul does not faint or become discouraged. Instead he sees himself identified in testimony with a victorious Christ (2 Cor 2:14-15). And by his conduct and preaching, a sweet fragrance of Christ rises up to God. Paul, who called himself the chief of sinners, is now the greatest vessel God has raised up for the shining forth of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Only God could bring about such a change in the life of any person.

Now, what God did in Paul, He is also doing in each one of us who have believed. God by His Spirit is writing Christ upon our hearts (2 Cor. 3:3). The law could not do that. It could only tell man what he ought to do, what is expected of him, but it could not change him (Rom. 8:3-4).

But the Christian has received new life (Christ) and a new nature that delights in what is of God. And the Holy Spirit now dwelling in the believer, occupies us with Christ where He is in the very presence of God. And as I am occupied with the Man Christ Jesus where He now is, a transformation will take place in me, a moral change, making me more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

Self — the great hindrance

Now the greatest hindrance to the work of the Spirit in the believer is self. Good self or bad self is still self. Self-esteem, self-worth, self-image, self-love, are at best the occupation with the wrong man, the very man whom God has set aside and condemned in the death of Christ. God is not attempting to improve man in the flesh. "Old things have passed away; behold all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The question might now be asked, How does this teaching help solve problems? First of all, we have to admit that "in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell" (Rom. 7:8; Jn. 6:63). The kind of problems which cause us so much trouble, in our individual lives, in our families, and in the assemblies, find their source in our flesh. So if we don't learn from God's Word that the flesh profits nothing, God teaches us by our own failures. But how sad if we have to learn it in this way. Yet what is even more sad is that we have grieved the Holy Spirit, and that every failure or sin necessitated those unfathomable sufferings of Christ on the cross. Then, as I learn how wretched the flesh in me is, I turn the eye of faith away from self and find in Christ an Object of supreme delight, One in whom God finds eternal joy and satisfaction.

Looking unto Christ

The second thing, after having experienced how wretched the flesh is in me (not in my brother), is to accept the teaching God has given in this, as in many other portions of Scripture. He is teaching us to look away from self to Christ and, in so doing, we take on the moral features of Christ. Some of these are obedience and dependence upon God, patience, meekness, self-control, and many others as are seen in Galatians 5:22-23. This is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working this out practically in the life of each believer.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul explains that our bodies, which he calls "earthen vessels," contain this treasure, which is Christ dwelling in the believer. And as the vessel is broken up, the light that is within shines out. In 2 Corinthians 5:10, the apostle Paul reminds us that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Everything we have done in our lifetime will be manifested in the light of His holy presence. Our motives, our self-seeking, even if it was mixed in with our service for the Lord, will be manifested. What was done in secret or in public, at the work place or at home, in private counseling or in public preaching, all will be laid bare. O how searching this is! But remember, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, the sinful nature in which we sinned is no longer in us. We will then be with and like Christ and will rejoice in that our old selfish, sinful nature is once and forever done with. Only what was of Christ remains forever.

Christ really is the remedy

If we, like Paul, lived our lives in the light of that day, what a difference it would make. It is far easier to sing, "Nothing but Christ as on we tread," than to live it. For to live it means that it will govern what I wear, how I spend my money, where I take my vacation, how I speak to my wife or husband, my attitude towards my children. Moreover, it will affect relationships in the home, at the work place, and in the world. But what is most important, it will introduce an atmosphere in the assembly which is Christ-honouring; yea, indeed it is the mind of Christ.

Having the mind of Christ equips us to face all dangers. It enables us to make the right spiritual decisions. We will then understand with whom we can fellowship and when associations are defiling. True separation and holy living is found only then, when it is coupled with affection for Christ and obedience to His Word (2 Cor. 6:17-18). Then the question is never asked, "What's wrong with this or that?" but, "What is pleasing to Christ?"

Paul then concludes this section (ch. 7:1) by giving a word of encouragement: "Having therefore these promises." If we allow God to work this out in our lives we will experience the deep peace and joy of fellowship with the Father. This will make all suffering or sorrow which we pass through well worth while. Faith looks beyond the present and evaluates everything in the light of eternity (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

It is my earnest prayer that these reflections may result in deeper exercise in all who read them, so that Christ may be reflected in greater measure.

A Letter on Peace With God

—Free Translation from the Dutch

Dear One,

You complained that you do not have "a settled peace." Your peace comes and goes and does not seem to last, and therefore, you make little progress in knowing the truths of God's Word and knowing the Lord. This complaint is, I am sad to say, not a rare one. It is a result of an incomplete knowledge of the gospel and of being confused about two different matters. With the Lord's blessing, I hope to be able to help you, if you on your part will carefully weigh what I am going to say.

Just recently I met one who was in the same situation as you. I asked her, "Do you have peace with God?" The answer I got was, "Not always." Both of you mix up the *peace with God* (Rom. 5:1) and the *peace of God* (Phil. 4:7). That is to say, when you are happy in the Lord, you say, "Now I have peace"; but if, because of failure or temptation, you are downhearted and gloomy, you think that your peace is gone. To meet this condition, I would like to ask you to carefully search out what *peace with God* is based on. It is of infinite profit to someone to see that its basis is *not within us, but outside us*; for then it will also be seen that our experiences have nothing to do with this question.

Christ has made peace

Let us together look up Romans 5:1. There we read, "Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ." When we then look at the passage in which this verse occurs, we will immediately understand what is the source of the peace we are speaking about. The connection is this: After the apostle explained how Abraham had been justified before God, he continues: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness... Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness... He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now *it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also*, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God*" (Rom. 4:3,9,20-25; 5:1 KJV).

In these verses it is very clear that the work of Christ is the only basis for our peace with God. Now that the foundation, the basis has been laid, God makes a declaration concerning everyone who believes God's testimony regarding this. This declaration covers all who believe that He has in grace intervened, making a perfect provision for the salvation of the sinner. It covers all who believe in God as the One who has raised Christ from among the dead as proof that He is completely satisfied by the work of Christ on the cross. God declares that those sinners are justified, and that they, because they are justified, enter into the peace that has been made through the death of Christ.

We see too, that Christ was delivered for our sins and raised for our justification (Rom 4:25). This means that the resurrection of Christ is the proof of the perfection of His work. It proves that the sins for which He died have been forever done away. It testifies that every demand God had regarding us has been perfectly met and that God is therefore satisfied. For if He was delivered for our offenses, and He has left the grave as risen from among the dead, then the offenses for which He entered death must have been done away, otherwise He would still be a captive of the grave. The resurrection of Christ is therefore a clear and express declaration from God's side that He is satisfied by the atonement made on the cross.

It is clear then that the only basis for peace with God is found in the death of Christ. This is often repeated in Scripture. It speaks for instance of us as those "justified by His blood" (Rom. 5:9); it also says, "having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). It is therefore Christ who has made peace with God. He made this peace through His sacrificial death that met every demand of God upon the sinner. Christ, while meeting all God's righteous demands upon mankind, glorified God in every respect: in all His character, in all that He is. Now God can plead with the sinner to be reconciled to Him (2 Cor. 5:20).

Believe God's testimony

Now that we have reached this point, it becomes clear that the only important question for everyone is, "Do I believe the testimony that God has given regarding His Son and the work of His Son; do I believe that Christ has finished that work for me?" If it is hard to answer that question, we cannot make further progress at this moment. We can, however, take a little test that may help to bring the truth to light. On what do you rest when it is a question of your acceptability before God? Is it on yourself, your own works, or what you deserve? If so, you cannot rest in the work of Christ. But if you acknowledge that you are by nature hopelessly lost and finished, and you confess that you have no hope apart from Christ, then you can in great humility say, "By God's grace I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and the value of His work for me!"

Well, if you can say this truthfully, then I can tell you that you have "settled" peace with God. Nothing can take that peace from you. It is not subject to change or variation in experience, for it is your unchangeable, irremovable possession. Scripture says, "Therefore, being justified by faith — and you say that you believe in the value of Christ's work for you — we *have peace* with God." At the moment one believes these things, he is justified, acquitted of all guilt, and becomes the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). And because he is justified, he has peace with God, but — and now take good notice of this — not peace within himself, but peace through our Lord Jesus Christ. This means that the peace that he now possesses is the peace with God that Christ made by His atoning sacrifice. And since it is the peace that He has made, which therefore was made quite apart from us, there can be no such thing as change in it. It cannot go up and down, but is as stable and lasting as the throne of God. For, as we have seen, it is a peace made by Christ through the cross; and what He has done can never be undone. Therefore it is an ever-remaining peace. And this lasting, established peace is the part of every believer.

Enjoying peace

What you really mean when you complain about not "*having* settled peace," is simply that you do not *enjoy* what you have, that your experience is so changeable. It may, therefore, be well to find out how a believer can continually experience or enjoy peace in his heart. The answer is very simple. It is through faith. If I believe God's testimony, that He is completely satisfied with me because of the work of the Lord Jesus, then I will immediately begin to experience it in my heart.

This can be clarified with the help of an example. Suppose you received information that through the last will of an acquaintance who passed away you have become the owner of a large estate. The way you feel after that depends entirely on whether or not you believe what you have just heard. If you doubt the reliability of the information, it will not find much response with you. If, on the other hand, the truth of the information is confirmed, and you believe it without doubting, you will immediately say that the estate is yours!

Exactly the same holds true for peace with God. If you believe the testimony of God, that peace has been made through the blood of Christ, neither feelings, nor downheartedness, nor a sense of unworthiness, nor any circumstance, can disturb your assurance on this point. You will see that it entirely depends on what Another has done.

That there is so much uncertainty on this point is mainly because we look upon ourselves instead of on the work of Christ on the cross. We tend to turn within to see if there is anything there that entitles us to say that a work of grace has begun in our heart. We ought to look outside of self to note that the only basis on which we can stand before God is the precious blood of Christ. The result of looking within is that when we see there the corruption, the wickedness, of the flesh, we begin to doubt if we have actually not deceived ourselves. When Satan has so ensnared us, he will overwhelm us with doubts and fears, hoping that it will bring about distrust in God, if not complete despair. The only effective way to cross him in his attacks in that direction is to appeal to the written Word. In answer to his wicked insinuations we should say, "It is written," just as our blessed Lord did. Then we would quickly discover that nothing can disturb our enjoyment of this peace with God which has been made through the precious blood of Christ.

Now that this fundamental question has been answered, you will — because you are no longer occupied with yourself — have the rest needed to meditate on the truths revealed in Scripture. "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that ye may grow by it" (1 Pet. 2:2). When you then also study the Word in the presence of the Lord, you will enter into an ever deeper relationship with Him. You may then search out His infinite perfections and glories that have been unfolded to us, which can only be understood in the power of the Spirit. Then, too, your affections will in an ever-increasing degree be stirred up, and your heart, now satisfied, will overflow with worship at His feet. Then, too, your complaint will have changed into a song of praise!

Your brother in Christ.

*In Him [Christ]
all the fulness [of the Godhead]
was pleased to dwell,
and by Him
to reconcile all things to Itself,
having made peace
by the blood of His cross.*

Peace (3)

—R. K. Campbell

Things that make for peace

Following in the practical side of having the peace of God in our lives, we turn to the exhortation of Romans 14:19: "Let us pursue the things which tend to peace, and things whereby one shall build up another." If we would enjoy peace in our hearts, we must engage in the things which promote peace and edify or build up others. Those who are known as "troublemakers" do not enjoy the peace of God in their hearts. They are not at peace themselves so they stir up among others and disturb the peace.

The writer of the Epistle of James has some plain words to say about what promotes peace and the character of the wisdom of God. He says: "If ye have bitter emulation and strife in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This is not the wisdom which comes down from above, but earthly, natural, devilish. For where emulation and strife [are], there [is] disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above first is pure, then peaceful, gentle, yielding, full of mercy and good fruits, unquestioning, unfeigned. But [the] fruit of righteousness in peace is sown for them that make peace" (Jas. 3:14-18). These words are very clear and simple to understand in themselves and need no explanation. They declare what characterizes earthly wisdom and what manifests heavenly wisdom and what is the fruit of righteousness. The latter is peaceable and sown in peace by them that make peace.

The blessed Lord Jesus said: "Blessed the peace-makers, for *they* shall be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:9). The prophet Isaiah and the apostle Paul declare: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that announceth glad tidings, that publisheth peace; that announceth glad tidings of good" (Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:15). Though man seldom speaks of beautiful feet, God calls attention to the spiritual and moral beauty of feet that preach the gospel of peace and bring good things. The opposite of such beautiful feet is given in Proverbs 6:18 — "feet that are swift in running to mischief." This is stated as one of the seven things the Lord hates.

We are enjoined in Romans 12:18: "If possible, as far as depends on you, living in peace with all men." The same epistle tells us that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And finally the desire is expressed: "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that ye should abound in hope by [the] power of [the] Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17; 15:13).

The God of peace

The passage we began with in Philippians 4 goes on to speak of things that are to be followed in order that the "God of peace" may be with us. "For the rest, brethren, whatsoever things [are] true, whatsoever things [are] noble, whatsoever things [are] just, whatsoever things [are] pure, whatsoever things [are] amiable, whatsoever things [are] of good report; if [there be] any virtue and if any praise, think on these things. What ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, these things do; and the God of peace shall be with you" (vv. 8-9).

Here we have not only peace *with God* and the *peace of God*, but the *God of peace* Himself with us as we think on the positive good things and do them. This is very practical and lovely. As mentioned in our previous messages, the term, "the God of peace" is found six times in the New Testament and three of these times it is stated, "the God of peace be with you." In the one place the words are: "For the rest, brethren, rejoice; be perfected; be encouraged; be of one mind; be at peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). Thus we see there are conditions to be met on our part if we would enjoy the God of peace Himself with us. It begins with thinking on the good things and then practicing them in our lives and the result will be that we experience the blessed presence of the God of peace with us. Peace will then also be radiated forth to others out of our lives. May we all aim for this blessed, heavenly experience in our lives.

Christ's kingdom of peace

We can only briefly refer in closing to the wonderful kingdom reign of Christ on earth in the coming day when He, the Prince of Peace shall be given the kingdoms of this world by God the Father. In that day "He shall speak peace unto the

nations; and His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9:10). "He will judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thine afflicted with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people... In His days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace" (Ps. 72:2,3,7). Then the promise of Romans 16:20 will be fulfilled: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet." Satan and all evil will be put down and the Lord alone shall be exalted. Meanwhile there can be no lasting and real peace among the nations while Christ, the Prince of Peace, is rejected.

The End

*Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith,
we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Rom. 5:1

For He is our peace.

Eph. 2:14

The Prophet Jonah (4)

—R. Been Sr.

It is remarkable that the expression "salvation is of the Lord" is found several times in the Old Testament, but not once, in that form, in the New Testament. Why would this be? Would it not be because in the New Testament our eye is directed to the salvation of the Lord come in the Person of Jesus Christ?

"And Jehovah commanded the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." Jonah's sin stays as it were in the sea, but he himself is saved. Through the grace of God Jonah came out of the fish better than he went in. As a free man, Jonah was small, but as a prisoner within the fish he learned to be great.

Where the fish vomited out Jonah we don't know. In God's Word we see that, as a rule, the Lord returns one who has departed to the point of departure. Thinking of this, we suspect that Jonah was vomited out not far from Joppa. There Jonah stands again on the beach, perhaps some seaweeds still stuck to his clothes. He is as one risen from the dead.

Consider again how, in this portion of Jonah's history, God gave a prophetic view of the people of Israel. The repentance of Jonah during his stay in the fish points to the Jewish people. After a time of chastening, of being set aside and of oppression, they, too, will come to repentance. The "third day," the day of the resurrection as a nation, will dawn (Hos. 6:1-3). The nation has hardened itself; it refused to listen and as a result it suffered, and judgment and scattering came. But soon a faithful remnant from the two and ten tribes of whom Jonah is a type, will turn again to God with repentance and humiliation. The rabbi of whom we wrote in the introduction said, "We are Jonah!" That does not only hold true in regards to the rejection, but also in regards to the re-acceptance (Rom. 11:25-27). In the "belly of the fish," in the "grave" of the nations in which the Jews now find themselves, repentance will be brought about in a remnant from among them. Based on Christ's sacrifice, of which Jonah is a picture (Mt. 12:40), this remnant will receive a blessing. They will receive the salvation of the Lord, the entrance into Christ's kingdom. In this manner all Israel will be saved, which means: out of all twelve tribes there will be a remnant that will form the new Israel. In the fish Jonah learned what grace is. The remnant will learn this too.

How remarkable does Jonah's prayer become when we see a shadow of Christ in him. His complaints about the bands of death, the shackles of the grave, the waves and billows of God's wrath moving over his head, the abyss, are all found in various psalms, especially Psalm 42, which speaks of the sufferings of Christ.

God's counsel stands firm. He executes all His desires. This we saw in Jonah's case. And it will soon be seen with the people of Israel. That is also seen in the Lord Jesus. He was crucified according the counsels of God. Also according to God's counsels, His soul was not left in hades, and He did not permit His holy One to see corruption. Christ rose from among the dead according to God's counsels. Through the death and resurrection of Christ *salvation of the Lord* has been prepared for the world.

God's counsels will stand firm! With this thought we ended the exposition of the second chapter. We find the existence of God's counsel also in the third chapter. No matter how far people depart from God's way, how much they may want to act and walk according to their own lust or will, God's counsel will stand. This will be seen at the end.

Of course, this doesn't give people a licence to do what they want. They may, however, be the cause of a delay, be it long or short. Da Costa once said, "When a train derails, there will be a delay. It takes a lot more time to set the wagons back on the rails than to derail them." But it is also true that eventually the wagons stand once again on the rails, and the train reaches its destination.

This picture is very applicable to departed saints, certainly not only to prophets, or servants, such as Jonah. When believers "derail," there is delay and confusion in their history, and sometimes even in that of others who come in contact with such apostates. Yet, eventually God interferes. He knows how to put things right, back on the "track." In the end, people can never frustrate God's purpose, for His counsel will stand. Of course, they still bear the difficulties, the misery of their "derailment."

The third chapter of the book of Jonah begins with the announcement that the word of Jehovah came again to Jonah. After all that had taken place since the Lord's first command to Jonah, after all the misery that had come over the prophet, but also after Jonah's repentance, the word of the Lord came for the second time to him. *In essence it is identical to the first command.* Jonah must now preach against Nineveh the words that the Lord will speak to him. It is as if the Lord now wants to direct his attention to his dependence upon Him in his service. In the second command the wickedness of Nineveh that had heaped up, mounted up before the face of God. It is now essential that Jonah no longer reasons, allowing himself to be guided by his Jewish feelings. The Lord does not take another prophet to preach against Nineveh. *He had called Jonah to do this and that remains so.*

So often God must say to believers: "*Do it again, do it again!*" Jonah did not listen to the Lord but rebelled. When he is restored, God says to him: "*Do it again!*" Peter had failed to pay attention to the admonition of the Lord Jesus. Though the others would be offended, not he. When he had repented, the Lord as it were said to him, "*Do it again!*" Mark put his own rest and ease above the difficulties of the Lord's service (Acts 13:5,13; cf. Acts 16:37-38). Once he had been restored, the Lord told him as it were, "*Do it again!*" How many believers are there who at the cost of much dishonour and much misery are faced with the words, "*Do it again!*" We can learn from the great Educator that it is good to make people do things over again. That is better than to push them aside.

Often God needs to go to great lengths to mold His servants, His children, so that they become useful for Him. Just to think about ourselves gives us enough to ponder. How often did we have to do it over again? And *even our "doing-it-again" was often flawed with failures and mistakes*, just as it was in Jonah's case. Evidently, the evil weed of selfishness in his heart was not yet eradicated with branch and root.

But still, they who have confessed their evil, their disobedience, in uprightness before God, are often God's best hands to serve others. They can give a deep impression of the holiness and righteousness of God, but also of His grace, love, and faithfulness.

Then Jonah goes to Nineveh, according to and with the word of the Lord. Now he had learned obedience. In this power he prepares himself to speak the word of the Lord in the strength of the Lord, whatever Jehovah would tell him.

The word of the Lord is the power to go and to speak. Obedience leads one not to speak one's own thoughts, but the thoughts that are contained in the Word in its context. It will not be softened, nor sharpened. There will be no adding nor subtracting. One speaks "as the oracles of God." One time the words are like arrows and fire, then again as balm. We will see that Jonah did not yet quite understand the "heavenly balm," the grace of God.

To go to Nineveh, Jonah had to make a long journey. First, he had to travel right through Palestine and then the long caravan route via Damascus to Nineveh. The Lord could also have placed Jonah immediately in Nineveh. We read that Philip the evangelist was suddenly transported from the Gaza road to Azote. Jonah, however, had to make a long journey. During that journey he could contemplate everything that had overcome him, he also could be confirmed in his restoration.

When he, finally, reached Nineveh, he saw how great a field of labour it was. It took a three-day journey to traverse the city. In Genesis 10:11-12 we read that Nineveh was a great city. Generally this is explained as meaning that Nineveh's size was great, and this explanation is not wrong. But we believe that here it is said to suggest a little more. In those days, Nineveh could be considered the centre of the Gentile world.

There were many people for God in that city, and *it was then the subject of God's grace*. Just the same way as Corinth in the New Testament was a city for God because there, too, there were many people for Him (Acts 18:9-11).

God knows the great city Nineveh in which more than 120,000 children alone lived who did not yet know the difference between their left and their right hand. This means that they, because of their young age, did not yet consciously know evil. The Lord even mentions the great amount of cattle. It was a city with a population into the millions, a world city in those days. He knows too that there were many adults in that city who, though living without Him, were receptive to a preaching of repentance and conversion. In view of all this, God calls the city a great city, although Jerusalem was this in the fullest sense of course.

Historians report that Nineveh had walls over thirty feet high, and so wide that three wagons could be driven on it side by side. On those walls stood fifteen hundred towers of defense, each sixty meters high. Excavations have entirely confirmed the information concerning Nineveh found in the Bible. One should read what the prophet Nahum writes about this city and its inhabitants. Fabulous riches, wealth, squandering, reckless abandon were rampant in the city.

This was Jonah's field of labour. He had to warn such a city, full of ungodliness and violence: if its inhabitants would not turn from their sins, they would be overthrown.

When Jonah has gone one day's journey into the city, he preaches: "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*" It was a short but forceful message in which a certain ultimatum was given. No doubt, Jonah did say more, but this was the essence, the theme, to which he ever returned.

To be cont'd

Outline for Bible Study (71)

143. The Upper Room Discourse — John 14

Outline

1. Our Hope, the Father's House Jn. 14:1-12
2. Works of Faith Jn. 14:12-14
3. The Promised Spirit Jn. 14:15-24
4. The Promised Peace Jn. 14:25-27
5. The Lord's Departure Jn. 14:28-31

Explanation

1. The Lord had spoken about His death, now He speaks with them about heaven. His announcement that He was leaving them filled them with deep sorrow (14:27; 16:22). Though horrible things faced Him (Judas' treason; the flight of the disciples; Peter's denial; the suffering and death; even God's wrath), He thinks of His own, strengthens their hearts, revealing to them His full love and the Father's.

Up till now the disciples had believed in God whom they had never seen, now they should also believe in the Lord Jesus though they would see Him no longer. Their earthly, Jewish, hope remained unfulfilled. From this day forward indignity and enmity would be their portion, but they had a place in the Father's house. Israel did not know God as Father, but as the "Almighty God," as Jehovah, the Eternal, Unchangeable One. Until then, men had no place in heaven, but the Lord's death prepared a place above for men. The Lord will not be satisfied till He has all His own with Him. The real hope of the believers is the coming again of the Lord to take up all His own to be with Him.

The Lord then speaks about the way to the Father. Through His death and resurrection, He is the Way. At the same time He is the Truth, the truth about God and from God, the full revelation of God. He is also Life; He gives life, so that he who has the Son has divine life (1 Jn. 5:12,20; Jn. 17:3). The Son fully reveals the Father in His whole being, in His words, and in His works (vv. 7-11). The Lord had not done many miracles in Jerusalem, but the disciples would do great works there (Acts 2:41; 4:4,16; 5:14-16) through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

2. After the Lord's departure, the believers may pray in His name to the Father, for their position as children is the same as His. The Son shall hear their prayer (vv. 13-14) so that the Father may be glorified. The touchstone of their love to Him is their obedience (vv. 15,21,23-24). Where obedience is lacking, love lacks.

3. Though the Holy Spirit had always been working on earth, He did not indwell believers, because the Son of God had not yet been glorified (Jn. 7:38-39). Nor was there as yet a living temple in which He could dwell (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Now the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, would descend to be with them and in them forever (v. 17). The Holy Spirit would give them knowledge of Christ (v. 29; 16:14) and of their union with Christ (v. 20), that they are in Christ and Christ in them (Rom. 8:1,10). He would also bring to remembrance all the Lord had said to them (the Gospels). The Father and the Son will manifest Themselves to those believers who are obedient (v. 21), just as an obedient child enjoys more the nearness and love of the parents.

4. First the Lord says: "I leave peace with you." This is peace for the conscience through His blood. Then He says: "I give My peace to you." This is the peace of heart He enjoyed in the midst of a hostile world. He rested always in perfect fellowship and love of His Father. Now He tells them: "My peace I give to you... Let not your heart be troubled."

5. Thinking of themselves, the disciples could not rejoice in the Lord's departure; thinking of Him and His gain, they would. His departure was also gain for them (Jn. 16:17). The ruler of the world (Satan) was coming, but he found nothing in the Lord that would make Him subject to death, and the bonds of the grave. Christ was the Holy One. Nobody could take His life (Jn. 10:18); He voluntarily laid it down out of love and obedience to the Father (v. 31).

Lesson

The Holy Spirit therefore indwells every true believer (1 Cor. 6:19; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:26; 4:6), but only an obedient heart will enjoy the love of the Lord. With such the Father and the Son will make Their abode (v. 23).

144. The Discourse on the Way—Relationships — John 15

Outline

1. Abiding in Christ Jn. 15:1-8
2. Abiding in His Love Jn. 15:9-12
3. Relationship with Believers — Loving Jn. 15:13-17
4. Relationship with the World — Witnessing Jn. 15:18-27

Explanation

1. Israel, once God's vine on earth (Psa. 80:8-14; Isa. 5:1-7), had not borne fruit, therefore it was set aside. The Son of God is the true Vine (Psa. 80:8 and Mt. 2:15). The vine is weak, insignificant, not strong or beautiful, and needs much care; only its fruit is precious (Eze. 15). The vine depicts the Lord in connection with His disciples, not just those who are born again, but all who profess His name, born again or not. The Father is the Husbandman, who prunes and cleans so that the fruitful branches may bear more fruit. The disciples who walked no more with Jesus (Jn. 6:66), and Judas were unfruitful branches that were taken away. Others (e.g., Peter, Mary, and Martha) bore fruit.

All professing Christians are branches of which the Father expects fruit. Only those can bear fruit, however, who have divine life through God's Word (v. 3), but they must abide in Christ (vv. 4-5). "Without Me ye can do nothing." Abiding in Christ molds the heart according to the will of the Lord, causing one to ask that which the Lord can give (v. 7 and Psa. 37:4).

2. The Father loved the Son during His pilgrimage through this world, because He always did that which was pleasing to the Father (Mt. 3:17; 17:5; In. 3:35; 8:29). The Son loves His own and, just as He said before: "Abide in Me..." (v. 4), so He now says: "Abide in My love" (v. 9). He abode in the Father's love by keeping the Father's commandments, and so those who keep His commandments remain in His love. The fruit of obedience is joy, His joy, full joy (v. 11).

3. Now, the Lord commands: "Love one another" and He repeats it (v. 12,17, cf. 1 Jn. 4:7,11,21). God is love and love is the characteristic of new life (1 Jn. 3:14; Jn. 13:35). Only in love are we able to serve one another, and if necessary, to give our lives for one another. When we obey, we are His friends who receive His confidential communications (vv. 14-15). Abraham, who displayed the obedience of faith, was God's friend (Jas. 2:23) in whom God could confide (Gen. 18:17; Psa. 25:14; Prov. 3:32). When Abraham prayed for Sodom, God answered Him; so shall God grant the request of His own who bear fruit and ask in Jesus name (v. 16).

Disciples will experience a twofold result of their faithfulness: *Love*, of the Father, of the Son, and of one another, and *hatred* from the world (vv. 17-21). If they, though not belonging to the world, yet would walk with the world rather than reprove their evil works (Eph. 5:11; 1 Pet. 4:3-4), the world would love them (v. 19).

4. Israel has made itself guilty of the most serious sin by rejecting its Messiah. The Lord's remark, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin," shows how the sin of rejecting Him causes all other sins to dwindle in comparison (vv. 22,24). The disciples had to be aware of this. Again the Lord promises them the mighty Comforter coming from the Father, the Spirit of truth. He would bear witness of Him, and they, who had been with Him from the beginning, would bear witness of Him too (vv. 26-27).

Lesson

First we need a life-relationship with Christ: Abide in Him through faith. Then we need a work-relationship with Him: Abide in His love through obedience of faith. This enables us to have a proper relationship with other believers: Love one another, thereby testifying of God's love to a world that hates us.

To be cont'd

Joshua 1 (4)

—H. L. Heijkoop

Many unbelievers receive also earthly blessings. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5:45 that God allows His sun to rise over the evil and the good, and that He sends rain upon just and unjust. And in Acts 14:17 the apostle Paul says that God gives rain and fruitful seasons from heaven to all nations.

There is more

But now God in His grace also wants to show mercy because He does not want "that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Some Christians are satisfied to know that they are saved for eternity. That is important! But there is more. We may also occupy ourselves with the Person who has saved us, and the place where He is now, as well as with all that has become ours now that we are children of God.

Christ crucified in weakness

Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians that only in Christ, who has been crucified in weakness, is there salvation. What a contrast with the gods and demigods of the Greeks, who could perform mighty deeds. The Greeks knew for instance Hercules who could carry the globe on his shoulders. In contrast with this superstition, Paul wanted to know among the Corinthians only a crucified One, Someone who had hung helplessly on a cross, and who had thereby become the Saviour by whom every human being can be saved.

Longing for the Lord's coming

Many believers thank God each day for good health. That is good! They thank God each day for sufficient bread. That is quite correct! We may thank God for many earthly blessings. We may also thank God that we do not have to go to hell, but, as said, there is more. Do we also long for the coming of the Lord? If we do this, *why* do we long for it? Is it because all difficulties will then be over? Is that a proper motive? Many believers do not really long for the Lord's coming because they understand very little of the spiritual, heavenly things.

To die is gain

Tremendous if we can, with Paul, say: "I long to depart and to be with Christ, for that is by far better" (Phil. 1:23). Paul wrote this way because he had seen heaven. He had seen the Lord Jesus in glory (Acts 9:3-5). He had been in the paradise of God, in heaven, where the believers are who have fallen asleep. There he had heard words that a man is not allowed to speak (2 Cor. 12:4). He knew how glorious the portion is of the believers who sleep in Christ. Paul could say: "For me to live is Christ, and to die gain" (Phil. 1:21).

Back across the Jordan

We return to the two and a half tribes (Josh. 1:12-18). They go with the people through the Jordan. They help in the battle to conquer the land. But then they go back to the land across the Jordan, to the fat meadows for their cattle. There they want to live and enjoy life. But they do not enjoy the land they have helped to conquer. They do not know the blessings of the land. Some believers, too, are satisfied with earthly things. Their hearts do not long for the heavenly things. Still, they have battles to fight; they, too, find it terrible when Bible critics attack God's Word. They defend the Bible with all their might. So they defend the name of the Lord. They defend the certainty of coming things, of going to heaven, but they do not really take possession of it. This attitude is seen in the two and a half tribes.

The Lord thy God give thee rest

Joshua says to them, "Remember the word that Moses the servant of Jehovah commanded you, saying, Jehovah your God has given you rest" (v. 13). Joshua further tells them that the men who are fit for war have to go up. They say that they will do so. Further they say, "According as we hearkened to Moses in all things, so will we hearken to thee; only may Jehovah thy God be with thee as he was with Moses. Every one that is rebellious against thy commandment and hearkeneth not to thy words in everything that thou commandest us, shall be put to death" (vv. 17-18). Then they use the words of God saying, "Be strong and courageous." Their heart is upright before the Lord, but they have no real interest in the things that the Lord wants to give them. Yet they have conquered Sihon and Og and have accepted the land in which they are going to dwell from the Lord's hand.

What a pity

I have often met believers who do not understand much of the heavenly calling. Their thankfulness goes no further than thanking for the earthly blessings. Yet they are faithful in their possessing them. They really use their earthly blessings in God's service. Perhaps they have less insight, but they are often more faithful in earthly things (over which the Lord has appointed them stewards) than many other Christians. What is good with them, we must acknowledge and appreciate. Yet, we may feel sorry that they do not receive more of the great things God desires to give them too. Their hearts could be infinitely richer. Then they could also glorify the Lord Jesus and the Father much more than they do.

What do we do with this gift?

If, three weeks after giving someone a great present, I discovered that he still had not unwrapped it to see what it is, I would be disappointed. And if, after three years, it would still be unopened, I would be *very* disappointed. Then I would say, What a pity that I gave such a great present. What must it be for the Father when we do this with the great present He has given us? How must God feel when we do not show any interest in it and are not occupied with it? What does it mean to Him when we do not search the Scriptures to see what blessings are ours, failing to make them our own? Actually, then we despise what He in His infinite grace has given us. May this not be so with us. We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ (Eph. 1:3). We pray God to give us a desire to know these blessings so that we may enjoy them.

The End