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Golden
Candlestick

THE ANOINTING DIVINE

Part 2

THE GRACE OF GOD

T. Austin-Sparks

Volume 164

CHAPTER 4

VOCATION

I want to bring you back again to the words in the gospel by Luke 3:21:

“Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that, Jesus also having been baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon Him, and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased.”

“And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me ...” (Luke 4:17,18).

I am going to stop there; what follows will occupy us later. I just want to add to that a word from 2 Corinthians 1:21:

“Now He that establisheth us with you into Christ, and anointed us, is God, who also sealed us and gave us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

In pursuing our reconsideration of this great and important matter of the anointing with the Holy Spirit, we are now going to focus our attention upon perhaps one of the most important features of this matter. That is, that the anointing always relates to one thing, and that is vocation.

We read that the anointing came upon the Lord Jesus and then He himself declared why the anointing had come upon Him: “... because the Lord has anointed Me to preach ...”. The anointing of the Holy Spirit concerns vocation. If you want to change the word to ‘ministry’ you can, but ‘ministry’ is too often limited in our conception of it; vocation is perhaps a more comprehensive term. May I point out here again that the Scriptures

that we have read, to which many others could be added, make it quite clear that what was true of the Lord Jesus in this respect is also true of the church. I take it that Paul's message, which was to the church in Corinthians, is a message to the whole church. Because, in between the Lord's own personal anointing at the Jordan, and this passage in 2 Corinthians, we do have the day of Pentecost, the day of the anointing of the church for its mission in Christ. That is quite simple and self-evident. But I do want you to grasp this thing, not as something said, but with realisation. Now, there is a lot of difference in knowing a thing in a way, and realising that you possess it or you know it. You have a lot of things without exactly realising what you have, or the value of what you have. And it is this realisation, beyond the statement of truth, that I trust will come to you.

You and I, if we are 'in Christ' as this word in Corinthians says, are supposed to have the anointing in Christ. "He which establisheth us with you into Christ, and anointed us (in Christ)"; we are all supposed to be anointed people. It is not what you feel like at the moment; it is the divine fact. Are you in Christ? Then, if that is true, you have been brought into the anointing which is on Christ. You inherit that very anointing which came on Him after His baptism. You are an 'anointed' person. As we said earlier, there is nothing greater we can conceive than that we should be people anointed with the Holy Spirit, if only we knew what that means. However, here is the truth.

Then, if the anointing which is upon us in Christ is true, it is with vocation in view, The great governing factor of the anointing is vocation. It brings us into divine purpose; it means that every one of us is in Christ for a purpose. There should be no person in Christ without a purpose in life, by the Holy Spirit. We may need instruction and enlightenment to understand what it is, but I am taking pains for the moment to underline and emphasise the fact. If you are not aware of the fact, altogether without the explanation and the interpretation, then you should raise the question of no less a thing than your place in Christ and the meaning of being in Christ. When you came to the Lord, if you did not have begotten in you a sense that life had taken on a new meaning, that there had come into your consciousness a meaningfulness in life, then there was something wrong with your new birth, for this goes with your union with Christ. That could be put in various ways: now there is something for which to live; now you are under constraint to do something; now there is a goal towards which you have to move! It can be put in many ways, but they all amount to this. You have started on a line which has a meaning, and that is the very Spirit

of vocation. You will do something; you will aim at something; you will have an objective in life; you find that you are under some constraint. So the presence of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of the anointing, carries with it and is inseparable from vocation!

I have commenced with the individual fact that we make a personal matter of this; we are not passengers; we are not 'things' to be carried along by some institution or organisation. We may be very small cogs in all the works, but the whole thing would be thrown out if we did not fulfil our function. We have to realise that and I think there are far too many who have not this sense of being under the Holy Spirit's urge unto something.

But I want to carry that beyond the personal and the individual, because we, as individuals, only receive it in a larger setting, really. If we come to the New Testament, for instance, a whole lot of individuals were involved; but really they came into their personal sense of divine initiative, drive, urge and motive because the corporate church came into a mighty compulsion and propulsion by the Holy Spirit. First of all, the church was taken up in this matter, and it is very obvious that a tremendous sense of commission and vocation came with the Holy Spirit. On that day of Pentecost, and from that day, the church is a 'thing' with a purpose and a motive; a tremendous driving-force; and all the individuals derived their own personal sense of meaning from that whole. We shall come back to that presently. Now, what is the essential, indispensable justification for the existence of churches, local expressions of the whole? Why should the people of God be gathered together in smaller or larger numbers or companies in any given place? What is it that justifies their existence? What is it that really is the basis of their being there at all? Is it just to meet together and have nice fellowship, help one another along, be some nice little thing in that place, happily going on, or miserably going on, occupied with themselves, ministering to one another, nursing one another, is that it? Well, those things may come into it, but the local companies are only part of the one church universal. And the purpose, nature and justification of the church universal, which passes to the church local, is vocation. Any local company that is not really fulfilling an anointed vocation is not justifying its existence. The Lord brings local companies into being, not to be something in themselves, not to be an end in themselves, and not just to look after themselves, but with a vocation to fulfil in the world around them. And they must be there with this sense of responsibility and mission beyond themselves, this sense of vocation. The

whole Bible could be taken to show that that is true. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because ... ” — because — what follows is a purpose — “because the Lord has anointed Me” to ... something.

Vocation under the anointing

Having said all that we come to the vocation under the anointing. I am loath to depart from that, without making quite sure that you really have your hand upon this matter. If your life is truly under the government of the Holy Spirit, it will not be a ‘dead end’. If any company of the Lord’s people is under the government of the Holy Spirit, it will not be a dead end! If you are where you are because the Lord has led you there, and that is how it ought to be, you are there with a divine vocation, for the fulfilment of which you can count upon the anointing. In your profession, in your business, in your home, and in your assembly, as a part of it, this is a law, that there is something more than the thing itself. You are called into a vocation if you have received the Holy Spirit, and that gives meaning to life. If we take ourselves out of the hands of the Holy Spirit and choose our own way, and go where we think we should go, and make our own decisions in these things, very often we get into a backwater; we are out of the way, and there is nothing coming of it. We have to be very sure that we seek first the Kingdom of God. That is only another way of saying that we move by the Spirit in what we do, or we might find ourselves out there with no more meaning than what we are doing day by day, for time! This is the meaning of the anointing.

The Bible falls quite naturally into three aspects of the anointing. These three aspects are, in the divine conception, inherent in the very creation of man. Adam was created to be the vessel, vehicle and instrument of divine vocation, and vocation in three forms. But Adam let it go and tragically lost his divine vocation. There are depths of meaning here, which might be even dangerous to try and fathom. But there are hints of something tremendous in this matter. There was, the Bible reveals, an anointed cherub who covers, whose name before his fall was Lucifer, the “son of the morning”, now known as Satan. There are strong hints that his vocation had to do with this creation, and he forfeited it by taking things into his own hands, out of the anointing. If the anointing means one thing, it means absolute dependence upon God. It means that everything comes from God, and not from the person concerned. It means that God is most jealous to keep things in His own hands; that is the meaning of the anoint-

ing. God must maintain the overall government of things by His Spirit. The anointing was violated in that way, and that high place was forfeited. Adam was then created and would have come into the anointing to fulfil the great purpose of adoption if he had not failed and missed the ‘anointing’. There is a last Adam which God brings in and anoints with that very object. And so the Bible opens out along these three lines: first, with the creation of man, and the object of his creation; then, the development of a nation, to be the object lesson of what the anointing means as to vocation. The people of God also failed in all three senses. And then Christ and the church which is His Body are brought in, as God’s success in this thing which has been inherent in the creation of man from the beginning.

Kingship

What is the anointing? First of all, it is dominion. If you like, it is rulership, government, or, to take the Old Testament title, kingship, royalty, in a divine sense. It has not been sufficiently recognised that the anointing of the Lord Jesus on the Jordan side had this threefold vocation included and involved, and the first aspect of it was government, authority, kingship, rulership, dominion! We have seen that this was what the enemy was trying to undercut.

Government or kingship is one of the major lines of the Old Testament. But kingship is not something official now; it is not something that is temporal, as we understand it in the temporal realm. Kingship is a spirit; royalty is a nature; dominion is something of a spiritual kind. First of all, recognise that the Old Testament naturally opens up along that line, as one of its three lines. It begins with Adam: “Thou madest him to have dominion.” And then you find that before the thing assumes the form of official position, it has already existed in a spiritual and a moral way. It is tremendously impressive.

Abraham, as we have seen, is spoken of as one of the Lord’s anointed in Psalm 105, “the Lord’s anointed”. Well, Abraham stands in the presence of kings of this earth, and Abraham is superior. These kings of the earth are cringing and bowing to Abraham. Morally and spiritually he is, so to speak, head and shoulders above them. In the presence of these men, he is the king!

Israel — what is Israel naturally, from the standpoint of this world looking on? We know quite well what the nations thought of Israel naturally! What about Balaam being hired by Balak, thinking that this

people could be just completely subjugated, brought under, despised? But Israel, there and then with all that they were or were not naturally, all their weaknesses and imperfections and faults, rose to tremendous stature at that very point: “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob!” “The shout of a king is among them”! Israel rises to spiritual and moral standard in the midst of the nations, embodying the principle of the anointing which was dominion, kingship. Before there is anything official, it must be moral and spiritual.

So we could go on. How true it was of the Lord Jesus! All the rulers were baffled, nonplussed and defeated in His presence. They cannot handle this Man; they cannot humiliate this Man spiritually and morally, whatever they do. He is over them all the time. That is true of the church, when moving under the anointing.

Now, that is all objective. What about you? What about any believer? Is this not true, that when a man or a woman receives Christ into the life, (which is but one way of speaking of ‘receiving the Spirit’) immediately that happens, without any reasoning, or calculation, or thinking about it at all, a new spirit of elevation begins to work in that life. You have seen it; I have seen it — a poor fellow in utter rags, never having worn a decent collar at all; a miserable, wretched creature, dragging himself about; his home could not be called a home, but rather a hovel; his wife and children in the most deplorable state, in poverty and misery because of sin. I have seen that man born again, and within a week, coming to the meeting with — as a first step — a nice clean white bit of scarf tied round his neck, and his clothes brushed down a bit. I have seen that go on until he had a decent collar and suit, and shoes to wear; and his home was beginning to change together with his children and his wife. No one ever said anything to him — not a word. It happened! It happened from within! I want to say that that is the spirit of royalty at work; the spirit of heavenly ‘aristocracy’ at work in the heart; the spirit of glory — for that is what belongs to kings — glory! And the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Glory. Now that may be an extreme illustration, but it is a very true one; it happens again and again. A sense of shame comes in because of certain things, perhaps ways of speaking, old habits and so on, which are perhaps slow to fall off. But there is now a sense of shame and blushing coming in which was never there before; there was never a consciousness before that the thing was wrong or doubtful. What is true in such extreme cases is a principle and a law of the Spirit-governed life. If you are governed by the Spirit, if you are under the anointing, you cannot be slovenly. You cannot be

careless in your life and habits and dress. You cannot have an untidy home, a disorderly state of things, for which you are responsible. It ought not to be. You ought not to need anyone to point out that that is wrong. “The Spirit Himself”, says John, “dwelling in you teacheth you.” “You have no need that anyone teacheth you; the anointing teacheth you all things.” And this is one of the things that the anointing teaches: it makes of a disorderly life an orderly thing and that is what you expect to find in kings’ households. It makes of disreputable life a reputable thing; it tidies up life all round. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Kings, of princes! It is a spiritual and a moral thing, you see. The point is that the anointing means elevation, and it always does lead to a higher level of life. It lifts, it ennobles, it refines, it makes for God’s gentlemen! This is the Spirit of kingship, and this is the law of government and ascendancy. You see, it is far better to have it like this than to have the office and the title, and for the condition to be just a contradiction. No, princes in Israel are first of all spiritual and moral people, before they are official. The anointing means that!

It is just amazing how Jesus could fit into any situation, poor and rich, ignorant and learned. He fitted right in, but it was the anointing that did it!

Now, you see, His anointing is for kingship, which in this dispensation, is a spiritual and a moral thing; it is the mighty power of elevating people, taking them from the dung-hill and setting them among princes.

So, the anointing for us should mean a growing refinement and an increasing sensitivity to what is fitting, what is becoming, what belongs to the palace, for we are children of the King, sons of God. Well, that can be viewed in two ways; it can make you feel uncomfortable, and seem to be a legal imposition again which is going to make life difficult. If you take it like that, you have missed the whole point. The law of the Word of God is always positive: “Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.” In other words, if you live by the Spirit, it will happen! This is what will happen! Mark you, what happens or what does not happen reveals just how much we are being governed by the Spirit.

So, kingship, with all its wonderful meaning, does not mean self-importance nor making an impression by our own effort, but just *being* different.

Now, we may anticipate the other aspect of the anointing, which is the vocation. Have you grasped the point that what I have been saying is a vocation, a ministry, a service; it is something that really is ministry. I believe it is far more effective in this world to be a person of spiritual dignity

and character like this, than it is to go round with your Bible preaching and taking meetings! If you are a person who walks in the Spirit, with this character, a person of spiritual strength, who will not descend to a mean thing; who will not contemplate anything that is petty or despicable, but be morally above it, like Nehemiah, who said: "Should such a one as I flee?" That is the spirit of the king! If you are such a person as that, and this dignity is found in your home, your home is a dignified place. Wherever you have any influence and power at all, that is shown in the orderliness and refinement of character, that is a tremendous testimony to the Lord. Put it the other way round; see how the Lord is let down when it is not like that; what the Lord loses. This is vocation: to *be*, to be!

I am speaking largely to responsible people. You will recognize that the law of the Word of God is, always and in all matters, that the person has got to *be* the thing before they get the name, the title or the office. You have got to *be* an elder before you can be made an elder. You have got to *be* a prince before you can be called a prince. That is a law of the Word of God — you have got to *be* this! And it is the anointing which makes for this reality.

Priesthood

We can pass quite easily to the second aspect of this vocation, which is that of the priesthood. Just as the kings were anointed, and were kings by the anointing, so the priests were priests by the anointing. Priesthood is another thing, right from the beginning, inherent in God's thought concerning man. Before there was ever the necessity for blood sacrifice, for atonement; before ever the sin question came in, requiring certain aspects of priesthood, the whole matter of standing between God and His creation mediatorially, intercessorily, was there. Man was created to be a priest in this sense, that here is God, and here is His creation, and there must be one in-between to communicate from the one to the other, to stand for the one to the other, communicating both ways. Adam was intended to be that, a king and a priest in this spiritual sense.

And so the Old Testament unfolds along the line of anointed priesthood. True, there has now come in this whole sin matter, calling in the entire system of blood sacrifices. But the principle remains that the anointing means that there is that between God and others by which He makes Himself known, communicates Himself, commits Himself, and which brings them into knowledge of God. Priesthood, as you know, first of all

means mediation, that is, standing between. It also means standing between to minister from God to man, and from man to God. And then to teach: “The priests lips must keep wisdom” that is, must teach knowledge. The suffering aspect has come in now to priesthood; suffering is that with which the priest has to do. But when you have said all these things about it, the church is called into the place of Israel in this whole universe. Where Adam failed, where Israel failed, Christ has come in and brought His church into being to be ‘a kingdom and priests unto His God’; “He hath made us a kingdom and priests unto His God”! It is not our title; it is not our office. Are you, young Christian, old Christian, whoever you are, are you taking this home to you, that as truly and surely as ever Aaron and his sons and his long line of sons, and the firstborn in all the households of Israel, were the priests in Israel, standing in this holy and sacred position, as truly as that, you are that in the thought of God? You are that! When you come to a meeting for prayer, you are coming on the ground of your priesthood, and may function under the anointing in intercession, standing there in your holy vocation, to minister from God to others, and bring others and their needs to God. What is true in prayer and intercession in that way (which is the great vocation of the church) is true in many other ways. We are here in this tremendous vocation — the individual or the local company standing there, not as an end in itself, but there between high heaven and Almighty God, and that city, and that neighbourhood, to minister God, to meet need out from God. Oh, what we could do if only we recognized our anointing!

The ministry of the prophet

I must leave that there, and pass quickly to the third and last of these aspects of the great vocation of the anointing — that is, that of the prophet. Again, the Bible opens up quite naturally along that third line: the prophet, anointed! Jesus was anointed King first, then He was anointed Priest. It was under and by that anointing that He went forward in a daily sacrifice unto the great consummate sacrifice of the Cross. The Great Priest offering Himself to God! What is true of His kingship, royalty and dominion, is true of His priesthood, as Mediator between God and man, is true in this third aspect, as Prophet. He was anointed as Prophet of the Lord; He gathered up into Himself the Old Testament line of prophetic meaning. “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you as he raised me up”, said Moses. And all the way through they were not only

seeing and hearing their prophets, they were waiting for *the* Prophet! When Jesus came, and He asked, “Whom do men say that I am?”, some said, “*The* Prophet” that one of whom Moses spoke, ‘A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you; *this is* the prophet!’ Ah, but He was more so than they thought, far more so. By the anointing He was that; but what is the function of the prophet? It is to recall and recover all that has been lost, which is of God for His people; to recall the people to that, which necessitates seeing what it is that God wants; and to recover that which was lost and bring it back! A tremendous vocation! And dear friends, oh, that you would realise that in your local company, this is what you are supposed to be there for — to recall, and to recover! It means that as a company you must know what it is that God has ever been after, and that the people of God have lost. There must be within you, as it was within the prophets, a travail to get it back, and to get the people back. It is a vocation to proclaim and enunciate the whole counsel of God; that is the prophetic function. And if we are to take Jeremiah as any kind of indication, “to pluck up and to plant”, to have to root up is perhaps the most difficult aspect of prophetic work: “Every plant which my Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.” Look at Jesus doing the uprooting of the false thing which had not been planted of His Father. It is difficult work to do, and there is a destructive aspect to the prophetic ministry that will not tolerate that which man has put in the place of God. Those things which man has put in the place of God have to be rooted out. On the other hand, it is not all destructive, there is also planting to be done. We are wherever we are for this and it requires the anointing. It is a big thing to be in the anointing of Christ; it is no less a thing than the fulfilment of the whole divine revelation of the Scriptures from Adam to the end. Anointed for that!

But this is what will happen, and this is what makes it simple even if it sounds complex and difficult. This is exactly what will spontaneously happen if we are moving under the anointing. These things will happen, they will be the very nature of our being where we are, how it will work out. There will be a vetoing and a nullifying and a rooting out of things which are not of the Lord; and there will a planting of what is of God. I do not have to try to bring all these things about, and do them. What you and I have to do is to live in the power of the anointing, and they will just happen! Oh then, for more anointed individuals, or more living in the power of the anointing, more local companies like that! Perhaps the Lord is just saying this to us to remind us, to pull us up over this whole matter, and

show us that we are not here just to drag out a painful existence, and try to keep going to the end. The anointing means something more than that! It means spiritual and moral ascendancy; it means being God's vehicle of supply; it means recall and recovery as to all that God ever meant for His people.

THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE

Reading: Luke 4:16-37.

The gospel of grace

And so now we are to be occupied with the anointing in relation to the good tidings, that which we call the gospel. As you see, Luke puts this incident very early in the ministry of Christ. It would seem that the Lord had visited Capernaum; perhaps He had taken in Cana of Galilee, but had come very soon to Nazareth. Luke, in his record, wants to make clear that the Lord Jesus, at the very beginning of His great ministry of preaching and teaching, in the very first sermon that He preached, struck the note of grace. The whole subsequent score, the great harmony of the gospel, would be tuned to that keynote of grace! It was Luke's particular object to record the gospel of grace. He differs from the other writers of the gospels, particularly in that matter. Matthew will give us the gospel of the kingdom. It is not a different gospel, but it emphasises that particular aspect of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. Others will have their own particular object in writing, but Luke knew what he was after. So his gospel, in a peculiar way, was tuned to this great initial keynote — grace! It is Luke who alone writes of the Prodigal Son, that great story of grace; of the lost sheep, of the lost coin; and sets over the whole of this gospel, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." It is the gospel of grace, and so he puts the Lord Jesus here, as at the beginning, and records this: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach good tidings."

Grace is here. It is mentioned actually in that word once, but it is there in the original language covered by another English translation: "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". Many of you will know that the original text is: 'the year of grace', the year of divine grace! That is what comes out here particularly. This is a sermon on the grace of God,

recorded by Luke and made the foundation of all the ministry and work of the Lord Jesus. Grace was declared to be the object of the anointing, *the* thing for which Jesus was anointed. The very anointing of the Spirit then has grace as the object! For this dispensation, referred to as ‘the year’, *the* year which began when Jesus came, and will end when He returns. It is a long day; it is proving to be much longer than anybody expected. It is not a day of hours, but a day of centuries, nevertheless bounded by a beginning and an end. The character of this dispensation in which you and I live, this ‘day’, is grace, good news as to the grace of God!

Well, to begin with, Jesus said that He was anointed to *preach* good tidings. Grace is proclaimed and proclaimed with a mighty context. There is a twofold background to this declaration of the Lord Jesus, under the direction of the anointing Spirit. Firstly there is the background of Isaiah 61. Now, if you turn back to that chapter from which this prophecy is taken, you will find its connection there, that is, its literal and actual connection of this very prophecy. And it is the prophet Isaiah who, in the first place, is speaking of himself; he is not, in the first instance thinking of the coming Messiah. He is saying of himself: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He (the Lord) hath anointed me to preach good tidings.” Isaiah was the preacher of the gospel then. But notice the setting. The setting in Isaiah’s day was the ending of the captivity of the Lord’s people in Babylon. For seventy long, weary years they had been in exile because of their sin. After lengthy pleadings, entreaties, warnings and beseechings, they still went their own way. The prophet said: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.” Because of their persistence in their ‘own way’, and not in the way of the Lord, at last the threatened judgement had fallen upon them. They had been carried away into exile, into bondage, and, according to the prescribed time, they languished there for seventy years.

Exile in Babylon

Whatever may have been true of some, who may have settled down, and sought to make the best of the situation, or even to have a good time with all that Babylon could offer, there were those who never did so. There was a considerable body of those exiles who longed for home, who said: ‘This is not home; we are in a foreign country; this is not the place to which we belong; this is not our life!’ A little glimpse into how they felt is given us in such words as: “We hung our harps upon the willows, and

said, How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?” No song in a strange land! They were a people in bondage; a people in weakness; a people deprived and stripped of everything that was really theirs by the will of God; bruised in spirit; imprisoned in body; blinded by frustration and disappointment; with an eternal longing in their hearts: ‘Oh, to get back home!’ Then the day came, the dawn of a day broke, and a sound is heard like a trumpet call; the prophet is crying: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings ...”. What are the good tidings? “... sent me to proclaim release to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord!” And can you imagine what those captives felt like when that morning they heard the cry: ‘The day of your release has come!’ You can ‘go home’, you can have all that for which your heart has longed these many years? You are free!!

That is the first background that Jesus takes up, and says: ‘Yes, but My good news is even better than that. This world is like that; you men and women are like that; you are exiles from your heavenly home, far from the Father’s house, in bondage and captivity. The god of this age hath blinded your eyes; you are in a pitiable plight, more pitiable even than those exiles in Babylon. But listen! I have come with good news! This is the year of the Lord’s release; this is the year of grace!’ It was this gospel that He was anointed to preach. That is the first background of this wonderful first sermon of the Lord Jesus. And before I pass from that, I want to remind you that He said: “This day is this fulfilled” — this day! “In your ears” — it is fulfilled. While there is no doubt in the first place that He was referring to that particular sabbath day in the synagogue at Nazareth, spiritually, it ushered in the day of release for all mankind.

The Year of Jubilee

But there is a second background, familiar to many of you. It is the background of the great festival in Israel, known as the Year of Jubilee. Once every fifty years in the life of Israel, a great festival took place, and it lasted for a whole year. During the fifty years, many a tragedy had been enacted; many a dark shadow had come in to spoil and blight the lives of the people. Here is a poor family, unable to meet its liabilities and pay its debts, and so under the law, this could be exacted in some way. A mortgage could be taken on their property; their inheritance of fields could be taken away and used to raise the crops and pay their debts, and they

would get nothing out of it. A son in a family could be taken and put to false labour, and get no wages, to pay the debt. People during the fifty years were having that sort of experience.

And then, in the fiftieth year, the Year of Jubilee, what happened? With the first streaks of dawn on that first day of the Year of Jubilee, the trumpets of Jubilee were sounded! And those who kept the sons in bondage had to go to them and say: ‘You can go home! I can keep you no longer; it is the Year of Jubilee; it is the year of release; I no longer have any power to keep you.’ Use your imagination — the family at home, on this festal morn, preparing the home, and scanning the horizon for the return of that son who had been kept as a hostage against their debt. Many a home, many a broken family mended on that day. And the lawyer has to write across the Deed of Mortgage: ‘Cancelled!’ and send it to the poor people whose inheritance had been taken away. All that sort of thing was happening all over the land; it was the Year of Jubilee! All slaves must be released! All properties must be returned! Everything under judgment must be freed! And listen! What is that sound? The keys are turning in the cells of prisoners, and gates of the prison courts are being opened, and the jailers are saying: ‘You can all go now; it is the Year of Jubilee!’

That is the background that the Lord Jesus takes up, and says: ‘Do you think that was good news to the land, to those homes, to those people? Good news? When they heard those Trumpets of Jubilee, do you think they rejoiced? Indeed they did! But I have a better gospel than that! The gospel, the Good News that I have come to preach and proclaim, is better than the return from Babylon’s exile, and better even than the Year of Jubilee! It is the gospel of the grace of God, of eternal salvation. Yes, He has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor. Yes, the poor!’ It was a bad thing to be poor in Israel; the creditor could come and take away your son, your home or your land.

“He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord.” So it was proclaimed, with a tremendous background. But (and I don’t think I am reading anything into this) what the Lord Jesus really did mean, and what it has proved to mean in this long-drawn-out day is, that what came with Him by the anointing is a better thing than Israel had in getting back to the land, and leaving Babylon; and a better thing even than they had in their Year of Jubilee once in fifty years. Fifty years may be a lifetime, but it is not eternity! What He came to give was eternal salvation.

We could dwell long upon the details: the prisoners and the blind people, the bruised people, and poverty; they all have a spiritual counterpart. But the sermon is not finished. Suddenly, a strange turn in the course of His discourse carries us away back into ancient Israel in the days of the two great prophets, Elijah and Elisha. And He says, as we have read: "Of a truth I say unto you, There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, and the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, when there came a great famine over the land. Unto none of them was Elijah sent, but unto Zarephath to the land of Sidon, unto a woman who was a widow." I wonder what Elijah would think about that. I don't know whether he knows about it now! He did appear with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration; he may know more than we think he does, but I am quite sure that if he knew, or when he does know, he will get a bit of a surprise that the Lord Jesus took that incident and used it in this way. What would Elijah say? 'Well, a terrible time followed my declaration that there would be no rain upon the earth by the space of three years and six months. There were many poor widows in Israel. But the Lord would never let me go to any of those poor widows to help them! However one day the Lord told me to go right outside the land of Israel altogether, to the land of Sidon, to a poor woman who was a widow. I had to go.' Well, we know what happened there. Elijah would say: 'I never realised what I was doing at that time! What was the meaning of it in God's mind?' The Lord Jesus has uncovered the hidden meaning of this. In the land of Israel they think they have a right to everything — of course they are *the* people! They have the oracles; they have the revelation; they have the commandments; they have all that which God gave at Sinai. They have it all; they are the people who have a right to everything! Self-satisfied, self-important — under judgment because of their pride and arrogance! They therefore are not suitable subjects of grace! You will never know the grace of God if you have any kind of mentality like that. You have to be like a poor widow who is regarded as an outsider, and you will know grace then. Now, it was a discovery for even Elijah, that he was enacting under the direction of the Spirit of God. He was enacting the gospel of grace in this sense that it is to those who are aware of their need, really conscious that if they are going to get anything at all, it will have to be the grace of God! Only people who have no sense whatever of merit in themselves, of right to anything at all, can speak like that: 'Tis mercy all, immense and free.' And it was a poor widow in the land of Sidon who came to know the gospel of the grace of God.

But the Lord Jesus does not finish there: “There were many lepers in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet.” Elisha had the anointing; he could, by the anointing, have cleansed all the lepers in Israel, but he was not allowed to go to any of them. This took place in Israel when Israel was not in the state to know the grace of God. However there was one man who was a foreigner, an outsider altogether, Naaman the leper! And to him alone was Elisha sent and he, alone, an outsider, was cleansed of his leprosy by Elisha. The Lord Jesus is putting enormous emphasis upon this! The true gospel is the gospel of grace. On the one side, you have no place in this acceptable year of the Lord, this year of the Lord’s release, this year of grace, and all that it means if you can still hope to find what you are after in any other direction than the grace of God. You are simply ruled out! On the other side, if you are such as the widow of Zarephath or Naaman the Syrian who is led and governed by this sense of poverty and sinfulness, you are the candidate for the gospel, the good news of the grace of God. And I think Elisha would be a bit surprised if he knew that what he did concerning Naaman the Syrian was going to be taken up by the Lord Jesus centuries after, and used as an illustration of the grace of God. He was enacting the very gospel of grace!

Grace proclaimed in Nazareth

That gospel is proclaimed, illustrated and set forth in this vivid and forceful way by the Lord Jesus. But such is the heart of man, and how it is born out there in Nazareth. Here it is! By the anointing He is proclaiming the good news, the gospel of grace, the Year of Jubilee, the Year of the Lord’s release! And they are not prepared to number themselves with the poor and blind and the imprisoned and the needy ones; they still stand on their religious dignity as *the* people, with the result that they reject Him who brought the good news of grace, and would destroy Him! Such is the heart of man; that is what men will do. They may go to church every Sunday, and in their religion say, ‘God be merciful unto us! And God be merciful to me a sinner!’ But you meet them immediately afterwards, and you say, ‘Hello, you miserable sinner!’ And see what will happen to you! ‘Oh no, we are not having that!’ That is what happened in the synagogue.

The Lord Jesus was trying on the one side to make them see that they were needing the grace of God and on the other side, that that grace of God had come to them that very day in His Person. But, their blindness is so great, and their imprisonment so strong; their exile from God so far,

that they will take the very Messenger of grace and destroy Him if they can. Grace rejected! I am not surprised that Nathanael said, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” That is Nazareth! But the Lord Jesus knew His own native town, the state of things there; He knew those people, their pride, prejudice and bigotry. (He had lived there thirty years.) This very sermon shows that He knew it and yet He makes that the very first place of His preaching of the grace of God! Marvellous, isn’t it? We would say: That is the place to be left; never go there preaching good news; they will not have it! Indeed, you will find that they will more than reject it, they will reject you! Nevertheless...

The Son of God knew when He came into this world what a reception He would have: “He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not.” He knew when He came here that He would not be received. But He came! ‘Tis mercy all immense and free! But that is not the end of the story. Oh yes, they led Him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built that they might throw Him down headlong ... “He came to Capernaum, a city of Galilee ... He was teaching on the Sabbath day. And there was in the synagogue a man which had a spirit of an unclean demon ...”. You know the rest. How does this really finish? Like this: “There went forth a rumour concerning Him in every place of the region round about”!

Grace has been proclaimed; grace has been illustrated; grace has been rejected ... but that is not the end. Here grace is triumphant at last! There in Capernaum, grace triumphs. A poor devil-ridden, dominated creature is delivered! The people marvel at this and a rumour of Him went through all the region! What kind of a rumour do you think this was? What they marvelled at was grace: grace coming from His lips; grace coming from His hands; grace coming from His presence. Grace! “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings to ...” those who need grace — that is what it amounts to! Those who need it? Ah, no, those who *know* they need it! Their only hope is the grace of God! “The year of grace”. “The year of release”. “The year of Jubilee”! Dear friends, that is the effect of the anointing. The Holy Spirit has assumed responsibility for that! It is the gospel of the grace of God. If you and I come under the Holy Spirit’s unction, we shall ourselves be children of the grace of God, and we shall be those whose supreme note, to which all life is tuned, will be: Grace, grace, marvellous grace!

(Concluded)

THE GRACE OF GOD

Reading: Titus 2.

We will consider the letter of Paul to Titus. I take the first part of the last verse of Titus 2 in order to throw back to what has just been said: “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority”. These things, speak, exhort, reprove, with all authority.

And so we look to see what “these things” are; and we go back to verse 11: “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works.”

Three things in that paragraph: the gift of grace; the goal of grace; the method of grace. “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.” And you have to link with the first statement, the last: “that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works”. Why did the grace of God appear unto all men, bringing salvation? Not just that they should be saved, and then rest upon the fact that they are saved people, and nothing more matters; but that He might redeem unto Himself a people for His own possession. Something more than their possessing salvation through grace.

The goal of grace is that He should have a people for His own possession. The kind of people for His own possession are here defined. We will not dwell upon the characteristics and features of that people. You see the various words and statements on both sides: the negative side — from... from... the various things that are said, from which this people for His own possession are to be redeemed, and the things which

they are to deny. That is the negative side, but it is very positive as a negative statement — something which must be; it must be. Grace demands character! Character is what God must have for His own possession; it is a kind of people.

Perhaps one of the great needs of our time is to recover the greatness of the cost of grace. Grace has been made a little too cheap. It is the greatest word in our vocabulary, but it has become one of the cheapest words, one of the words most easily used; because it is the common and all-inclusive word of the Christian vocabulary — but, oh what grace has cost! And therefore what really does lie behind our being redeemed, and our being a people for God's own possession? You will not misunderstand the use of the word, but I think that this passage suggests that this people should be a spiritual 'aristocracy' (that word can be used, of course, in a very wrong sense), but it means a people of high character, of high dignity, who have looked at these things mentioned, on the one side, and said: No, no more of that. I have done with that; it belongs to a low level of life. They have looked on the other side, and said: Now this is the standard which God has set and that is my standard, by the grace of God. You see, because the grace of God is not only that favour of God which is unmerited, it is a demand, it is a call, it is an energy, it is something by which we are able to rise to a very high level of spiritual character — a people for His own possession. Grace has come, but grace by its costliness makes very great demands. And the end is this: "Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity — redeemed from all iniquity — and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works." The gift of grace! The object of grace!

What is the way or the method of grace? It is in this one word at the beginning of verse 12. In the Authorised version, the word is "teaching us" to the intent that... . In the Revised Version it is "instructing us...". Perhaps you wonder what the difference is between 'teaching' and 'instructing'. Well there is a difference, for the revisers were seeking a word which would convey a little more than the word 'teaching'. You look back to Titus 1:11 and you have it like this: "Whose mouths must be stopped; men who overthrow whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake". Now that word 'teaching' is an altogether different Greek word from the one in Titus 2:11. The first word in chapter 1 means what we mean by teaching: telling people things. But this word here in Titus 2:12 is another word altogether, and it is the same word as is translated three times in Hebrews 12: "whom the Lord loves He chastens... It

is for chastening that ye endure... they indeed chastened us as seemed good to them, but He for our profit". That word 'chastening' and 'chastens' is the same Greek word as is here interpreted or translated as 'instructing' us. Now, everybody can see the difference between 'teaching', that is, telling people things, and 'chastening' them. Chastening is something very much more active. So here the method of grace is 'instructing', 'chastening', 'child-training' us — 'child-training us to the intent...'. Now, you see, grace leads us into trouble. Or, grace leads us into discipline. Grace brings us into a difficult school. It is grace! But what a different idea of grace! We can have the wrong idea that grace is grace, and you receive the gift of grace, and everything is alright, and you never need worry about anything any more, and you are just going to heaven, and everything is going to be beautiful — it is all of grace! And in grace, we have everything, and we need not give another thought to it at all! But here it says that grace has come to discipline us, to bring us into a school, the school of grace, a hard school, into this discipline, in this child-training, this chastening. And we often think this is anything but the grace of God, and we mean 'graciousness of God'! We have got to adjust ourselves and get our minds changed about this. It is just as much divine grace towards us to perfect us, as it is to begin the work of salvation. It is just as much a part of the grace of God not to let us off when we are wrong — but to bring us up short, and if needs be to do it very strongly, and seemingly unkindly. It is just as much a matter of divine grace to do that as it is to bring us into salvation.

It is grace after all. You and I do have to learn this lesson because for young Christians, when things begin to get a bit difficult, and the early blossom on the tree of the beginning of the Christian life when that begins to be torn off by rough winds, and there is nothing but apparent nakedness left, and it all seems to have lost its glamour, this Christian life; and they pass into difficult times; the temptation is to think that this is not the grace of God; this cannot be grace. And the devil will tell you that you have fallen from grace — not at all! Do believe it, young Christian, when the times become difficult in your Christian life, it is all of grace that it should be so. No one wants to be weak, flabby and sickly as a Christian; one who cannot stand up to anything at all; one who must have everything nice and comfortable in order to go on being a Christian. Well, if you looked at others like that, you would not admire them at all; you would not think that that was much good after all. That is how we look at other people. But let us remind ourselves that God's grace is at work to make us able to

stand up and be strong to go through and it is grace; and this can only be learned in a hard school. And people whom God wants for His own possession are people like that, who really can stand their ground in adversity, who really can hold on when there is a tremendous shaking about; who can show grace in their own lives when everything is ungracious around them. The Lord wants two things in the Christian life, two things which He has written so visibly in creation and yet which two things it is so difficult to combine in human character. They are perfectly combined in the Lord Jesus, and conformity to His image will be conformity to Him in these two respects — beauty and strength; strength and beauty! “Strength and beauty are in His temple” (Ps. 96:6). Study the temple again, and see. Strength — massive pillars; mighty foundations; strong walls. But look at the beauty, the carvings, the fruit, everything. Strength and beauty: look at it in creation in the massive mountains, the very embodiment of strength; and nestling at its foot, the beautiful wild flowers so tiny and yet so superb and wonderful. Strength and beauty in combination throughout all creation. God has said: this is His mind. And grace can make that combination; but it takes a lot of grace for us to be strong and yet to be beautiful. And some people are inclined to be too strong, and there is not the beauty and the loveliness, the kindness, the gentleness and the graciousness. On the other hand, some people are all for the artistic, and that other side; and, as I used the word just now, there is flabbiness about them; they are not strong. No, there must be a combination of these things in a people for His own possession.

So here, instructing, or teaching, you see, is the School of Grace. The Headmaster of the School of the Christian Life is one who is full of sympathy on the one side, but full of sternness on the other, as occasion requires, but there is perfect balance in Him; and His Name is Grace! Don't think of grace as something that is only soft. Grace can be very stern. But do not think of grace as always and only making exacting demands. Grace is full of sympathy.

Think, then, on these things. I have curtailed them very considerably, but here they are. “These things speak ...”. The word is “talk about”; “Talk about these things, and exhort ...”. “Come along now, come along ...”. “Exhort ...”.

‘Look here, I know you are having a bad time and you are inclined to think the Lord is against you, and this is not what you were led to expect, or led yourself to expect in the Christian life. But, come along, the Lord is only after something stronger, something deeper. You can never have the

fruit until the blossom has gone. And it takes terrible winds in order to get rid of the blossom, in order to bring on the fruit. Come on now!”That is ‘exhorting’. These things speak, exhort, “*reprove*”. Oh, is that a right word to use in the same sentence as the word ‘grace’? Reprove? With all authority? Yes, it is all grace. The Holy Spirit is like this, because He is called the Spirit of Grace. He can be stern with all His sympathy. He can be full of sympathy and yet be quite stern. He has, after all, when we think about it, some difficult children to deal with, and what difficult children we are! But grace, in the combination of sympathy and strength will make us a people for His own possession.