

Luke's Gospel; Reconciliation

Luke 2: 8-18; Luke 2: 25-38; Luke 7: 36-50; Luke 10: 25-37.

Readings with G. Davison extracted from "Precious Things" 1956-1990

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Our subject for this series of Bible readings is "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5: 18). We hope to see from Luke's gospel how that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them". In the birth of Christ, which is the subject of this reading, we see how God has drawn near to man in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. We hope to follow this line in the various events recorded, and also in the words of grace spoken by the Lord, having in mind to reach Luke 15 eventually. We begin, then, with the record of our Lord's entering into Manhood, and the celebration of the angels in relation to that wonderful event.

What is in view in the edict of the emperor mentioned at the beginning of this chapter?

Caesar Augustus would be an apt picture of the god and prince of this world. These emperors had divine honours given to them as in complete control of the civilised world. Hence this man makes an edict and sets the whole world in motion in his own interests. Yet by the edict Mary was to be found in the very place which had been prophetically indicated as that where Christ should be born. Thus God overrules the acts of a pagan emperor and causes them to be in absolute accord with what He Himself would do.

It would be helpful if we had a word as to what reconciliation is.

It is mentioned in four of the Epistles. In Romans 5 it is presented objectively in the gospel, and in simple faith we have received it. It is not explained in Romans 5 but we are assured that whatever it means, we received it when we received the gospel. In Colossians chapter 1 we see how reconciliation was effected in order that God might righteously bring us back to Himself. "You . . . hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy . . . in His sight". In 2 Corinthians 5 reconciliation subserves new creation, in that God has recovered us for His pleasure, we read "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again". Then, in Ephesians 2 it is in view of the mystery. Thus we have the thought of man's being completely recovered in relation to God's own thoughts and purpose and for His pleasure.

Is that enhanced by the fact that in the Epistles we have contrasted with reconciliation the thought of enmity?

Whilst the blood of Christ secures our forgiveness, the reconciliation of the believer involves a further matter, and so we read, "in the body of His flesh through death". There was a *state* of alienation with us, and that state needed to be judged; it has been judged at the cross, and a new state which is entirely

of God has been established.

So that as reconciled we are brought to God, and that in such conditions that God finds delight in us. The precious blood of Christ deals with our guilt, and the offering of His body with our state.

We note in Luke's gospel the lowly conditions which obtained at the birth of the One who came to manifest the grace of God, in order that what was for His pleasure might be established.

Would it be helpful if a word was said on the fact that there was no room for Him in the inn?

It would suggest a world which was not only without God morally, but which did not want God at all.

In such conditions God acted in sovereign grace, and the promised Child was born.

In relation to this matter of reconciliation, God had no need to draw upon any of the resources of this world, He had everything necessary in His own hands. We need to stress the point that God called for nothing from this world, and this wonderful Babe was born in circumstances which were humble and lowly beyond compare. But from Psalm 22 we learn that even at such a moment His trust was in God. All depended upon what God was doing and what God was going to do.

What is the bearing of the verse in Hebrews 10, "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared me"?

Obviously the "seed of the woman", as having the whole human race in mind, is in view. While there is the fulfilment of prophetic Scriptures, there is the fact that the Son of God Himself has, in infinite grace, come into Manhood to effect that which is for the pleasure of the Godhead, and this movement is introduced by a communication from heaven itself.

Does this take in the whole of the Lord's movements in Manhood from His birth in Bethlehem?

He came into the conditions of Manhood not only on the royal and the prophetic line, but as "the Seed of the woman". He took up the cause of man, but took it up in view of the glory of God, and He must become Man if He was to recover men for God. He might have introduced an order of manhood completely independent of Adam's race, but God had spoken of *the Seed of the woman*, and as such He is born into the world. He came into flesh and blood conditions as Hebrews 2 clearly states. In this chapter we are on the ground of Isaiah 7, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel".

Would you say that reconciliation is for God, although it can be enjoyed by us?

It is man recovered for the pleasure of God!

In Luke 2 we do not have reconciliation itself exactly, but we have the Person who is going to bring it about, and we have the explanation of many features that we now know in doctrinal terms. If we keep the Person in whom it is set forth definitely before us we shall learn more about the truth of reconciliation than we could in any other way. God commences with the *Person*; He ever had these thoughts in His heart, but He could not bring them into expression until Christ was here. And, we shall never really have the truth of reconciliation in our hearts, nor will it be seen in our testimony, until we see the importance of it all centring in the Person of Christ.

Would Galatians 4 bear on this? "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law".

Yes! And how beautiful it is to see God coming down in the limited conditions of a lowly Babe! How precious are those first words — "Fear not". If man had a dread of God in his heart, and he may well

have had through the way in which he had acted, God would seek to banish that dread from the outset of this movement in grace.

This chapter may present the Lord in a very lowly setting, but there is a glorious side seen in Timothy, "God was manifest in flesh . . . seen of angels". This is the first time the angels had seen God.

A Babe represents the point of utmost dependence in humanity. In the Old Testament the numbering of the Levites started from one month old and upwards, but here we get the Child mentioned right from the moment of birth; such were the conditions of His humility.

Did we get the full significance of the remark that this was the first time angels had seen God?

"Seen of angels" came out in regard to that which was displayed in this Babe when the divine features of God were manifested in public testimony. It began there, and these angels knew it was there and they spoke of it.

As accepting the conditions in which He was found the Lord was ever seen in perfect subject Manhood from the manger to the cross, and I am persuaded that only a divine Person could have accepted such limitations and humbled Himself accordingly.

"Fear not" was God's first words to the shepherds. He would, in this wonderful happening, remove all sense of terror from their hearts as the angel continued the message of grace, "for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, *which shall be to all people*". Here again we see the universal character of the promise made in "the Seed of the woman".

The conditions obtaining in Malachi's day are seen here, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another". Anna reveals to us what they were speaking about; but here they were, and into such conditions the Lord came.

God was intimating from the outset what was in His heart; had we been there we could not have entered into the full thought of God, even as the shepherds could not. But, thank God, we know today the blessedness of what was then being introduced.

"Fear not", is a good beginning.

A grand beginning! "Good tidings of great joy", that is one of the great features of reconciliation, and in Luke 15 we shall see that "great joy" is the result of this wonderful movement in grace. The results bear the character of the announcement.

Why should *shepherds* be singled out to receive this wonderful communication?

The first person in Scripture who is typical of Christ was a shepherd — Abel. In Moses, and also in David, we again see shepherd characteristics. A shepherd is one who gathers, and perhaps it is fitting that the incoming of One who was pre-eminently The Shepherd should be made known to shepherds themselves.

Two thoughts are brought together in the beginning of Psalm 80, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock". Then the Psalm goes on to say, "Thou that dwellest between the cherubim shine forth". He is not only seen in His lowly character as a shepherd, but He is the One who sits between the cherubim.

The title "A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" would indicate the greatness of the One who was coming in. Only One who is co-equal with God could have given effect to the great thoughts of God in reconciliation.

Christ, as we know, is God's Anointed, but He is co-equal with God Himself, Christ Jehovah. In Isaiah there is a term used several times, "The Arm of the Lord", and we find that "the Arm of the Lord" is personified; and here in Luke is "the Arm of the Lord" — God's Anointed — One who brings in salvation for men and glory to God.

The expression "Christ the Lord" is one that must bow our hearts in adoration and in worship.

"And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall be fruitful" (Isaiah 11: 1 New Translation). We have the two sides of the truth there.

We get a similar thought in the epistle to the Romans, "of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom. 9: 5).

In verse 10, where we have the expression "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy", we see in this approach of God to man that instead of man being afraid of God he is to know what it is to "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation". The word "atonement" in that verse (Rom. 5: 11) is really "reconciliation", and carries the thought of rejoicing in God.

In verse 14 we have what are perhaps the three outstanding features in reconciliation — God is glorified; peace is made, and God can now take His pleasure in His creature. We cannot reverse the order, God's glory must be secured first.

It is good to see from verse 11 that the wonderful Person who is presented to us as "Christ the Lord" is said to be "a Saviour". It was not God's desire to come down as a Judge. He came down in the character of a Saviour.

We often speak of the Saviourship of Christ as though it were an elementary matter, but we see that His Saviourship is connected with the glory of His Person. In John's epistle we read "The Father sent *the Son* to be the Saviour of the world". His Saviourship is thus linked with the dignity and glory of Who He is in His Person. Only such a Person could be the Saviour.

There are two precious thoughts connected with this truth. First it is *The Son* who is the Saviour, and the work is perfect and final, and yet the sign that is given in relation to the incoming of this glorious Person is a "Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes". This would emphasize His perfect humanity. We read in Isaiah 7, "The Lord Himself shall give you a sign; behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son". We see this literally fulfilled in "the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger".

May we warn one another of the attempts made in Christendom to weaken the truth of this; let us hold tenaciously to the fact of the virgin birth of Christ. We may say plainly that the publication called the 'New English Bible' weakens both the truth of the Lord's perfect humanity and that of His deity.

And suddenly there was . . . a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest". The coming in of this Holy Babe was to result in "glory to God in the highest", and the bringing back of men to God in order that He might find pleasure in them.

At the commencement of Luke's gospel we have a scene of "great joy" at the moment of the incarnation, and in the last chapter we have another scene of "great joy" as those He has secured through His work on the cross are found at Jerusalem, "in the temple, praising and blessing God".

The testimony given to the shepherds moved them towards the Person. If the truth of these things moves us towards Christ in our affections, we too shall be marked by this feature of praising God.

May we have a further word on these three statements — "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth

peace, good pleasure in men"?

It is important to see first of all that God is glorified. Sin has been dealt with; sins have been dealt with; the prince of this world has been judged at the cross; death itself has been conquered. These are but a few of the things which Christ has accomplished; every promise of God is fulfilled in Him, man has been recovered in reconciliation for God, and all that God ever desired for the delight of His heart of love is centred in the blessed Man in whose face the glory of God now shines. God's love has shone out in a Vessel who never impaired it; He brought the perfect revelation of God to us in love, and God is glorified in it all.

We cannot doubt that what is celebrated in verse 14 looks on to the world to come for its full accomplishment, when "peace on earth" will be enjoyed. The eventual fulfilment of this is as certain as its announcement, and we through grace have been brought already into the joy of it as knowing the One in whom it is all secured.

We read in Colossians that the day is coming when God will "reconcile all things unto Himself", but we read further that the saints are already reconciled. We have been brought into the good of this because we know the One who has brought glory to God in the highest; we know the One who will bring about peace on the earth, He is the Prince of Peace; and we know the One in whom God expresses His good pleasure toward men. As having the knowledge of this Person in our hearts we have been brought into reconciliation.

Luke 2: 25-38.

We have already seen that according to prophetic word the Lord was born in Bethlehem, and was found by the shepherds in the manger in swaddling clothes, the fulfilment of the promise that "a virgin should conceive and bear a son". In the section before us we have the presentation of the Babe in the temple according to the instructions of Leviticus 12. Thus, in accordance with the law which was still in force when our Lord was here, He would be found on true Israelitish ground, not limited to that ground but growing up on it in view of the time when He should step forth in His public ministry.

Simeon is introduced as in priestly conditions, coming into the temple, a man divinely enlightened of God and ready in the power of the Spirit of God to enter into the occasion intelligently. One feature of the opening chapters of Luke is the fact of the Holy Spirit's presence as the power to move the vessels mentioned, so that whilst the Lord Jesus Christ is presented to them objectively on the one hand, the Spirit is working subjectively in them to prepare affections for His reception.

Are we to gather anything from the fact that the scene moves from Bethlehem to Jerusalem?

This may be the fulfilment of the word in Malachi that "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple". Simeon was waiting for Him, Anna was waiting for Him, as He suddenly appears.

The Scripture continues, "Who may abide the day of His coming?" It is good to see that there was a subjective work wrought in hearts so that we have both a man and a woman able to abide His appearing. That would carry a challenge to each one of us! It shows the two sides of the truth, the approach of God in His well-beloved Son, and on the other hand the preparation of vessels for His reception.

So that if the Lord comes into holy Manhood, the Spirit of God rejoices to tell us that there is a man who represents an order of manhood which, as the result of the Spirit's work, is ready to recognize the preciousness of Christ.

Simeon means "hearing", and he evidently was in the right state to receive this communication, and ultimately to receive the Lord. We read that "the same man was just and devout"; he was devoted to the interests of God in this world, and it needed such vessels at this early moment to handle things, speaking reverently, in a right way according to the mind of God.

This man was *waiting*; he is indicative of that godly remnant whose hopes were all centred on the appearing of the Messiah, and in this prepared condition he is "waiting for the consolation of Israel". His moral state was right, his expectations were right, and he had the power of the Spirit for the fulfilment of them.

Yes! It was by the Spirit that he came in at the precise moment. Here is a vessel that God can use, and whom the Spirit does use, and he is suitably prepared for the reception of the Lord in the temple. We can understand that whatever is to be done in this holy matter, must be done in full accord with the mind of God. What needs to be emphasized is the holy character of the vessels that God had prepared to rightly handle this situation.

Might we not say with all reverence that the Holy Spirit of God at this moment is guarding this precious Babe; only hearts that were morally in accord with what was expressed in Him are allowed to handle Him; it is a beautiful touch of the guarding by the Holy Spirit of the preciousness of Christ. There are those today who venture to speak of the incarnation according to the mind of man, and one is afraid that they do not always handle the subject with holy hands. We do well to speak carefully regarding the incarnation of the Son of God.

Simeon had a special communication from the Lord. I think we must judge that this man must have been in very intimate relationship with God to have had such a communication, and yet, although so signally selected for this great service, he refers to himself as just a bondman.

Before he speaks of the wonderful blessing that is to accrue to the Gentiles and to Israel through the coming in of this Holy Vessel, the first thing he mentions is what God Himself finds in this blessed Person, "Thy salvation".

When he said that, he had the Babe in his arms; His parents had brought the Babe in to do for Him "after the custom of the law". So that we have both features of Galatians 4: 4, "made of a woman, made under the law". It is important to see that He did come as "made under the law" because that was necessary if blessing was to come to the Gentiles; every righteous requirement was fulfilled.

The sovereign operations of God are in view in the divine communications which were given to Simeon, and God has in mind to bring *us* into the good of these things. Has the knowledge of these things produced in us the same effect as that produced in Simeon? When he took the Babe up in his arms he "blessed God". Could there be a greater evidence of reconciliation than a company marked by blessing God?

He was anticipating the wonderful effect of the Lord's own ministry as seen in the last verse of the gospel, a company "continually in the temple, praising and blessing God".

We have a rather remarkable statement in verse 29, where Simeon says, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace". The word "Lord" is really "Despot", and we see the effect of a man moving under the power of the Spirit of God. Simeon recognized that supreme power was with God, not with the Emperor. Only a person having the advantage of the indwelling Spirit can really understand the trend of things in this world.

Why, as in the light of this wonderful communication, did Simeon desire to depart?

I think he was assured that however long he remained he would see nothing greater than that which he had been privileged to look upon as he held that Babe in his arms. "Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of *all people*".

What had Simeon in mind when he said, "The thoughts of many hearts may be revealed"?

The coming in of One who was God's salvation would result in the securing of all that would be for God's glory, and would bring into judgment all that which was not according to God. That is, I think, what is involved, but I question if Simeon understood the full implication of his prophecy.

He was "waiting for the consolation of Israel". When would that take place?

This term "consolation of Israel" is a reference to the Messiah. In Jewish writings the Messiah is sometimes called the "Consolation of Israel". Simeon's eyes were now fixed upon the Person of whom the Spirit had spoken.

Why is it that the Gentiles are mentioned before Israel (verse 32)?

Luke obviously writes with Paul's line of things in mind. In the epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians the apostle usually puts the Gentiles before the Jew; he had been given the truth of the mystery. Previously he regarded the Jew before the Gentile, but he had to learn that the Jew had no precedence in Christianity.

Simeon was using words which in their full meaning were probably quite beyond his own knowledge of things.

What is the meaning of "a light to lighten the Gentiles"?

In God's dealings with Israel He had to a large extent left the Gentiles to their own devices for the time being. In Isaiah 42: 6, the prophet speaks of "a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles". Simeon speaks of light going beyond the nation of Israel, all peoples being again in view.

"I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49: 6).

We have the same thought in Genesis 49 in relation to Joseph's branches going over the wall, It is clear that the whole world is in view in Luke 2.

If God in His ways selected a nation to whom He gave His law, and to whom He also gave many privileges, He nevertheless had blessing in view for the whole of mankind; we have already seen that the glad tidings were given in relation to the "seed of the woman".

It pleases God that the gospel should go throughout the whole world.

Yes! We are coming to that, but we should first notice that the word "to lighten" in verse 32 is really "apokalupsis", which means "an unveiling". It is the word used for the book of the Revelation, that is the force of the word — an unveiling of something hidden, of which the Gentiles knew nothing at all. The veil was about to be rolled away, and they would know that God had their salvation in view.

In Ephesians 2, we read that Gentiles "were without Christ . . . having no hope, and without God in the world". They were in gross darkness. Who could enlighten these Gentiles? The only One who could do it is the Son of God, and He came into the world for that purpose.

What is the significance of the words "And the glory of Thy people Israel"?

The glory of Israel would be the fulfilment of the prophetic word, "the Lord shall make thee the head,

and not the tail" of the nations.

In a day to come, when the words of Isaiah 53 are in the hearts and upon the lips of the people, it will be abundantly evident that Christ is the glory of Israel.

In verse 36 we read, "and there was one Anna, a prophetess". We see in her a vessel that had been in touch with God and had also received divine communications. She was one who had been seeking to maintain the interest of the godly remnant of Israel in relation to the coming Messiah. She was "the daughter of Phanuel", a name which has reference to the "face of God"; and as "of the tribe of Aser" we see in her features answering to what is said of that tribe in Genesis and in Deuteronomy. She was marked by prayers, and there was much to pray about; she was marked by fasting, and there was much to fast about.

It is said of Asher in Deuteronomy 33 "let him dip his foot in oil". A foot dipped in oil leaves an impression in its walk, and that is what Anna did, she "spoke of Him", and left an impression of Christ wherever she went.

It is somewhat remarkable that the tribe of Asher is mentioned here. Normally we might have expected a reference to Judah and Benjamin. Evidently Anna was a representative of the ten tribes, and perhaps there is in that a prophetic touch in relation to the future day when reconciliation of all twelve tribes to God will be complete.

It confirms what has already been said of the wider picture of blessing. God has not forgotten the ten tribes, nor did Paul or James, both had them in view in their writings.

What is involved in the expression "she . . . served God"?

We can hardly put it into words. Her service for God was obviously marked both by her works and her words. She was a prophetess.

There appears to be three distinct ways in which she served; she fasted, she prayed, and she spoke of Christ; three very good ways of serving!

Luke 4: 1-22.

In pursuance of our theme we move from the record of the Lord's birth into this world, and see in this chapter the beginning of his Levitical ministry. The three features before us are -

First: the character of the One in Whom God has approached us,

Second: the power that activated Him as He moved out from the wilderness, and Third: the introduction of that which is said to be "the acceptable year of the Lord".

We may say that we have in the gospel which He was anointed to preach the display of God's disposition to man. In the book of Genesis the attack of Satan upon the first man was the beginning of all the estrangement that has come into this world between man and God, and it seems fitting that this account of the temptation in the wilderness is given to show the distinctive character of this blessed Man, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as the One who was to "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3: 8).

Was it necessary for the Lord to be manifested to destroy the works of the devil before reconciliation could be effected?

If man was to be brought back to God, which is what we see in reconciliation, God must remove

everything contrary to His thoughts, and that could be done only by One in whom no feature of the first man was found. If the Lord is to deliver men from the power of Satan, then He must Himself gain the victory over Satan, and we judge that when the Lord speaks later of binding the strong man with a view to destroying his goods, the "binding" took place here in the wilderness.

In relation to the character of the Lord as Man, which is the first point under consideration, are the features of that character seen in His being "led by the Spirit in the wilderness", and in that the Word of God was enshrined in His heart?

I think so! He enters into conditions resultant from the fall and stands there for God. He is seen in these conditions as a perfect, sinless, incorruptible, subject *Man*, and it is as such that He overcomes the devil. The temptation was not to see whether He was sinless or not, but to bring *into manifestation the fact that He was*. The movement was His own in perfect holy Manhood, as subject to the leading of the Spirit.

It was characteristic of all His movements in this scene, all He did was in the power of the Spirit.

The order of these temptations is somewhat different from that in Matthew's record, where the history of Israel, we believe, is in view. It is rather the history of *man* that is in question in Luke, and the order there seems to relate to "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" — three things that are said to be "in the world" — and which things we have all become subject to, but in the Lord Jesus we see One who, as Man, withstood each temptation.

Do we see the principle here that "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me"?

Yes! Although those actual words refer to a later incident.

In the second chapter of Hebrews we read that He "suffered being tempted".

If one were asked what would constitute the suffering in this chapter, perhaps it would be right to say that the Lord knew suffering in His body, His soul and His spirit as He faced the threefold temptation. But these are holy matters about which we do well to say but little.

Is it not the case that in the two Old Testament examples of men who fasted forty days one, Moses, was in the presence of God (evidently he would not be suffering) and the other was alone? Here it is specifically stated that the Lord was in the presence of the devil. Would not that constitute the suffering you are speaking of?

In that connection we ought to remember that the Lord, being who He is with unblunted sensibilities and a sensitiveness beyond that of any other, would keenly feel the very fact that the devil was in His presence.

Do you think He would feel that on behalf of God? Satan was so opposed to God in the accomplishment of His will, and the Lord would discern that it was an attack through Him upon God.

"The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me" (Ps. 69: 9).

We see the true features of One who, in severe temptation has *God before Him*. Twice the Lord quotes "the Lord thy God", shewing how definitely God and the Word of God were before Him. I believe that to be most important — "I have set the LORD always before Me; because He is at My right hand, I shall not be moved" (Ps. 16: 8).

In these temptations the Lord is quoting the written Word from the Old Testament, but He is quoting that which *He Himself as Man* is in the good of.

We must remember what was referred to earlier, that this is the character of the Man in Whom God has approached us. If the devil had succeeded in finding a flaw in Him, then the approach of God would have been completely negated. The whole point of our readings is that God has approached men in Christ, and it is through this perfect, spotless Man that God has effected His great work of reconciliation.

In regard to the two instances in the Old Testament to which attention has been drawn, Moses afterwards failed and also Elijah. Indeed every member of Adam's race has failed, but here we see One Who resisted completely every temptation of Satan, and completely defeated his every attack.

In Luke chapter 11 we read, "When a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted". What was his armour in which he trusted? It was that every man of Adam's race would either fall to one or all of these three temptations. That was the armour in which Satan trusted, and the Lord took it away.

The Scriptures quoted by the Lord were all from the book of Deuteronomy, which we have learned to call "the people's guide book". The Lord thus took a place in subjection to the revealed will of God, quoting Scriptures that were affecting Him and guiding Him in His Manhood and to which He was answering. Hence, when the test came He could stand firmly for God.

John, in writing to the young men, recognizes that their power to overcome the wicked one is exactly this, "The Word of God abideth in you". Thus we see that God had in mind that there should be a generation patterned after the Man in Whom He has approached us.

It is necessary to stress continually the unique character of this blessed Man in view of some of the things that are taught today. God has approached us in One Who is absolutely flawless — the humanity of Christ is unique. We see Him as Man, living by the Word of God. Teaching which is unsound regarding the humanity of Christ would endanger, spiritually, all who heeded it, the very fabric of the Christian faith is based upon this truth.

In the next temptation the devil shows Him "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time", and says, "All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me". It has often been asked, how was it delivered unto Him. In the second chapter of Ephesians we read "According to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience". Satan has acquired power over man because man is in a state of disobedience. He has not power over an obedient man, and that is what we see in these verses. He acquired his power through the disobedience of man in the garden of Eden, but his power is annulled by the obedience of a Man in the wilderness.

It is characteristic of the devil's activity throughout the pages of Scripture that he attempts to anticipate God. We can see from Genesis to Revelation that before God brings in His masterpiece the devil presents his counterfeit. He is doing the same thing here. Eventually all kingdom glory will be seen to belong to Christ, but He refuses it at the hand of the devil.

Would the devil in fact have this power to give?

Well! It seems to have been so. The Lord did not refute his claim. So far as wilful, sinful man is concerned the whole world lies in the wicked one (1 John 5: 19).

Do we not see in Revelation 13 that one will be found to whom the dragon will give "his power, and his seat, and great authority"?

It is a serious thing to underestimate the power of the devil. We need not fear him, but do not let us underestimate his influence.

Would it not be true to say that the Lord is moving here as a dependent Man before One who *will* give to Him all that He asks?

Yes, indeed! The last temptation which we must now consider was probably the fiercest of all, as it attacked the Lord in His spirit.

It looks as though the devil was actually flattering Christ in quoting a Psalm that would remind Him of His Messianic rights.

Actually it was an insinuation that God was not equal to His promises -the very thing with which Satan attacked Adam in the garden, "Yea, hath God said?" There were promises made to the Messiah, and the devil was insinuating that these promises could not be trusted until they had been put to the test. But the Lord, as Man, knew His God, and that His promises were sure.

According to the second Psalm the Lord will ask these things from God.

Yes! It has been thought that the devil may have been suggesting that He should take them without suffering, but the order is "The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1: 11). These sufferings were before the Lord, and He was taking every step in relation to the will of God.

Would it help to say a little more as to the order of the temptations in Matthew, and their references to Israel?

The principles underlying the temptations as Matthew records them, would take our thoughts first to the giving of the manna; secondly, to the waters of Meribah; thirdly, to the golden calf. But in Luke it is not so much Israel, but man in general that is in view.

As having overcome Satan, verses 14 and 15 show the Lord moving out in the power of the Spirit, with a view to the deliverance of others. We can see that, having taken away the strong man's armour, it was for the purpose of spoiling his goods, and the Lord is about to demonstrate by His acts of power and by His gracious words, that He had both grace and power to deliver His creature completely. It is in the power of the Spirit He returns, and He returns to Galilee.

Why Galilee?

The poor of the flock are in view. Galilee was the place where the light was to shine according to the prophetic word.

The *power* moving in His ministry is now noticed (v. 14) following the manifestation of the characteristics evident in Himself — the positive proof of who He is in His Person.

Men might well say of Him later, "For He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1: 22).

It has been well said that the temptation was not witnessed by anybody, it was a victory gained in secret. That which we are now coming to is the public result of that victory.

"He taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all". God's being glorified is mentioned many times in Luke's gospel, but apparently this is the only occasion on which it is stated that the Lord Himself was glorified; He is glorified of all as He steps forth in His public ministry, and men glorify God as a result of what He did.

How remarkable that it should have been the book of Isaiah which was delivered to Him; in the ordering of God that was probably where they were reading on that Sabbath day. John Baptist had taken his ministry from the prophet Isaiah, and now that is where the Lord begins to read. It is

significant that Isaiah's name means "the salvation of Jah".

Referring again to the Lord as in Manhood, we see how well He knew the Scriptures; this is surely something we need to take to heart!

It says He unrolled the Book and He found the place, and there is something particularly precious in that. The One who indited the Scriptures found the place and, standing up, read it to those who were there. How we ought to approach the reading of the Word of God with reverence, as He did!

There is just another point here which bears on the Lord's perfect Manhood; it says, "As His custom was". Now, that is delightful! He was not just an occasional visitor to the synagogue, He was there regularly.

The section of Isaiah from which the Lord read is very striking. Isaiah 61 opens with "The Spirit of *Adonai Jehovah*" — a title which often occurs in Isaiah and in Ezekiel. Occasionally we have *Jehovah Elohim*, but in the majority of cases it is *Adonai Jehovah*, and that is what marks the passage the Lord read. He began with "the Spirit of Adonai", and ends with the acceptable year of Jehovah.

Adonai means the "Lord in blessing", and in the very prophets that announce the iniquity of Israel, we have this remarkable repetition of "Jehovah in *blessing*"; an attitude He was waiting to adopt if only they would listen to His voice and repent.

That would be absolutely in keeping with our subject, the way in which God approaches man with blessing in view.

The Lord omits the rest of the verse in Isaiah, "The day of vengeance of our God".

Actually "the day of vengeance of our God" does come in in chapter 21 of Luke, the Lord does mention it before He left the world, but He did not mention it at the beginning of His ministry. He was anointed "to preach the gospel to the poor . . . to preach the acceptable year of the Lord". Isaiah 61 obviously looks on to the world-to-come and to the establishment of the kingdom and the Lord, so to speak, was saying that it was then available to them in Himself if they would but have it.

Only the Lord can heal broken hearts!

That is the character of His ministry, which we have before us in these readings. And that ministry ever has healing in view, whether of the widow of Nain with her broken heart; the man among the tombs as captive to Satan; blind Bartimaeus; or, the man on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho who was bruised; all came under the healing touch of this precious ministry of grace.

Is it not beautiful to see how this good news is linked with Christ Personally when He said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears"?

And we are still in this acceptable year of the Lord!

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 6, which follow the ministry of reconciliation in the previous chapter, are "Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation".

What is the thought in the gospel being preached to the poor?

It shows the disposition of God in coming down in lowly grace, not merely on the official line of Matthew as the King who should have been received with royal honours; but the poor of the flock are in mind as we find indicated time after time in the Old Testament.

That little expression pretty well covers the whole of Luke's gospel — "glad tidings to the poor". The Lord repeated that word to John Baptist "the poor have the gospel preached unto them".

We have already quoted the Scripture "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them", and this is what we see in effect in the verses which the Lord read.

He was the only One who could bring these things to pass, and in the synagogue He was telling them plainly that He was the One to whom the Scripture referred. "The eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him", and He assured them that that day the Scripture was fulfilled in their ears.

Prior to this it was the law which had been ministered in the synagogues, now they were listening to words of *grace*.

They wondered at "the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth". Their response was "Is not this Joseph's son?". But the attitude of God is seen in those "gracious words", and that is what marks God's attitude towards men today as the gospel is still preached, it is still "the accepted time . . . the day of salvation".

Luke 7: 36-50.

In this well-known chapter we reach a point in our readings where, in relation to the subject in hand — the ministry of reconciliation, God seeking the recovery of His creature for His pleasure — we have one of the simplest and probably one of the most blessed examples of infinite grace flowing out, as seen in this Pharisee's house, in regard to the woman of the city who was a "sinner". In the previous verses the Lord had been speaking of the refusal by the Pharisees of the grace that was presented to them. On the one hand we see the rejection of that grace by them; on the other hand we see the reception of it by the publicans and sinners; and following the Lord's speaking of these things we have this wonderful picture where we again see the indifference to grace on the part of the Pharisee, but that same grace appreciated and gladly received by this sinful woman.

Would you say that this woman is a prepared vessel as indicated by the words "but wisdom is justified of all her children" (verse 35)?

Yes! That is why those verses were referred to. She stands out immediately as a picture of one of wisdom's children. There are five distinctive marks of wisdom's children in the gospels, and if we took them in order we should see this to be the first one, for at the end of the chapter the fact that she received the forgiveness of sins is clearly stated.

What was the motive of this Pharisee in inviting the Lord into his house?

We have sometimes heard that it appeared as though he had invited the Lord in order to insult Him publicly. The refusal of the courtesies which were ordinarily given to guests would seem to support the thought that this was a studied insult to the Lord Himself.

What contrasts are seen in this incident! The contrast of the motive that actuated the Pharisee with that which actuated the poor woman, and above all with the motives that were actuating the blessed Lord as He manifested the wonderful compassions of God.

We have noticed that whereas Simon the Pharisee's house was representative of the general state of the Pharisees in Israel — the very sphere into which the Lord had come — their religious pride and animosity against the Son of God did not hinder the grace of God from flowing out. It did not hinder the expression of that grace even to one like Simon, grace was there in the heart of God for both Simon and the woman.

Is this a typical example of the ministry of reconciliation?

That is what was in mind in regard to this chapter. We have spoken previously of reconciliation more on the doctrinal side, as brought into the world by the coming in of the Son of God and His own declaration of it in Luke 4. Here in Luke 7 we have an example of the matter, and the very words spoken to this woman would show that it was already taking effect.

We never read of the Lord's going to the house of a Sadducee.

No! It has been pointed out that He always met the Sadducees with the point of the sword. On more than one occasion we find Him in the house of a Pharisee, a sphere which today would perhaps represent ritualism, but for men who played fast and loose with the Word of God He had nothing but the Sword of the Spirit. We need to remember that today, when men are seeking to rob us of the truth of God.

There is no case in the New Testament of a Sadducee coming into blessing.

They did not believe the Scriptures, and no man who refuses the Scriptures can come into blessing. The Pharisees were seriously wrong in the way they handled the Scriptures, but it is not said of them that they did not believe them.

What infinite grace is coming out in this incident! Simon, in requesting the Lord to come into his house used a strong word of request. Indeed, it is the word used by the Lord in John 17 when He prayed to the Father, a definite request by one in a position to make a demand, and yet in wonderful grace the Lord acceded to the request.

There is much in that which we ought to note; we see the grace of the Lord shining out in such circumstances. He was infinitely superior to the Pharisee, but He is prepared to accede to his demand in order that in the Pharisee's house the wonderful grace of God might be seen flowing out in all its blessedness. There is an infinitude of grace in the fact that the Lord accepted the invitation.

Whatever may have been Simon's motive, the one thing that is outstanding is the amazing grace of the Lord, who with His foreknowledge of all that would happen, nevertheless went into that house.

That surely is the point we need to stress. The Lord fully knew the pride that was in the Pharisees' hearts. He knew that they loved the high places, and that Simon would seek some popularity, at the same time hoping to show how inferior the Lord was in his eyes; but the Lord, knowing all that, in infinite grace accepted the position in order that He might bring the compassions of God to this poor woman. It is indeed most blessed.

We should assume that the Lord took a very low place at the Pharisee's table (in Luke 24 He took the chief place in the home of Emmaus), for we can scarcely conceive that this poor woman went right to the head of the table. And it would seem that the Lord took a very lowly place in order that He might be accessible to this contrite soul. There is infinite grace in it all, the more we consider the Lord's movements the more that grace shines out, and the greatness of His Person is enhanced before us as we contemplate the way in which He dealt with the whole situation.

Our subject is the "ministry of reconciliation". How does that fit into this chapter where we have only the forgiveness of sins?

That we should know our sins forgiven is the very first, and a most essential point, on the line of reconciliation. Other things, if the Lord allows, will come before us but fundamentally we must all begin here. The first great necessity is the forgiveness of our sins.

The last word in the chapter, "peace", carries the thought of "*unchanging peace*". She was brought right to God.

Does not this incident show the disposition of God in the new creation?

In the two epistles which perhaps give us the highest Pauline ministry, Ephesians and Colossians, the forgiveness of sins is early introduced. We can thank God for every blessing into which we have been brought, but we must have the knowledge of sins forgiven if these blessings are to be enjoyed.

Our sins had brought in separation from God, hence they must be removed if we are to be in reconciliation with Him.

We must ever remember that if God acts in infinite grace He does so in absolute righteousness, so that the question of sins must be dealt with. It was provisional with this woman at the moment, but the principle is ever true.

Why was it provisional?

Forgiveness of sins really awaited the work of the cross, but these incidents are given us to illustrate the ministry that marked the Lord in His movements here as He manifested the compassions of God.

Reconciliation could not be effected without the shedding of blood, but the ministry of it shone out in the movements of Christ, and it was ultimately made effective by His death upon the cross.

If the apostle James had been at that feast, he would have said that this woman's faith was justified by her works; she showed manifestly her appreciation of the Lord as the Vessel of Grace. Matthew presents the Lord as the Vessel of Promise; Mark as the Vessel of Prophecy; John as the Vessel of Glory. Luke obviously shows us the Vessel of Grace, and here is a woman who not only apprehended that she needed that grace, but also proved by her works that she was prepared to receive it.

Why is it that her character is so expressly stated, "a sinner of the city"?

It is to show the limitless grace of God, indeed it is what Paul speaks of as "the riches of His grace".

It is evident that this woman had heard the Word of Christ, because it is said that she had faith.

Yes! We have noticed her works as the proof of her faith, but we see also from the Lord's words in verse 50 that her works were there because of faith.

Was it this woman's need that drew her to this house?

It certainly was, and such a sense of need that she would not be repelled. She might well have been repelled by the company and atmosphere of Simon's house, but she was so aware of her need that she did not allow the circumstances to repel her, and we can be safe in saying that she was also conscious that the Lord would meet that need.

Doubtless the Spirit of God had been working in her heart before she came; she was a prepared vessel, one of wisdom's children.

There is perhaps in this chapter more the thought of human responsibility than that of divine sovereignty. In a further chapter we shall see divine sovereignty in operation, but what seems to stand out more clearly in this chapter is human responsibility, and whilst we all appreciate and rejoice in divine sovereignty, we must see that human responsibility enters into the matter. Here is a woman who is a sinner, and if she is to be blessed she must come to the Saviour, but the very thing for which the Lord had come into this world was to make the grace of God available to sinners.

It is evident that even so early in His pathway He was known as "a friend of publicans and sinners".

Is there a link with Isaiah 52, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings"?

Doubtless we have presented here the One of Whom Isaiah speaks, and the fact that she poured this ointment upon His feet may show that she appreciated in some measure His gracious pathway.

Does not the Lord, in what He says to Simon, clearly indicate that her motive was affection for Himself?

Yes! That is a matter that should engage our attention.

Simon had the opportunity of anointing His head (see verse 46), but he failed to take it and, as he observed what this woman was doing, instead of its moving him as it ought to have done, it did but stir him up to further contempt for the Lord as he says "This Man, if He were a prophet, would have known . . . she is a sinner".

The Lord calls attention to her tears. No doubt they were the evidence of true repentance, a condition brought about through the goodness of God. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Romans 2: 4).

The Scripture would suggest that she *continued* with these acts of affection.

The words used show that she continued doing all these things all the while. She stood at His feet behind Him weeping and began to wash His feet with tears, and *was wiping* them with the hairs of her head, and *was kissing* them, and *was anointing* them. There is a continuity about it; it was not just one single action. "Since the time I came in (she) hath not ceased to kiss My feet", would show this. Whilst the Lord was speaking to Simon there was this demonstration of affection before his very eyes.

What is the significance of her wiping the Lord's feet with her hair?

It would show how deep her repentance was; it has often been said that which was given to her as her glory was that which she surrendered at His feet. We might ask how many sisters today could have done that with their hair.

This act appears to have aroused a feeling of contempt in Simon, exactly what might be expected from a proud religious man. "This Man if He were a prophet". The word "man" is really not there, it was an expression of absolute contempt. Do not let us be surprised when the voice of contempt is raised against us. Even the devoted act of Mary of Bethany raised a note of criticism!

Verse 42 introduces that which is very apposite to the subject of reconciliation which we have in mind. It has often been pointed out that only here do we get this parable of the creditor and the two debtors, a simple yet beautiful illustration of the attitude of God today to both self-righteous men and to sinners. "He frankly forgave them both", or it might be rendered "He showed grace to both". This word "forgave" is not the same word as the "forgiven" at the end of the chapter, it is a word which signifies that grace was available for both debtors.

When speaking to men of their responsibility before God, is it not well to seek to bring home to the conscience that they have *nothing with which to pay*?

That is the bearing of the teaching presented here. It was a most difficult thing to convince a man like Simon the Pharisee that he had *nothing with which to pay*, but the Lord was showing that both were bankrupt so far as the claims of God were concerned, and it is on that account that the free grace of God comes to men through Christ.

These verses indicate that the Lord is definitely fixing responsibility on Simon. In verse 39 we are told that it was the "Pharisee which had bidden Him" who raised the question of the Lord's knowing who the woman was, and then the Lord names him, saying "Simon". It was a very solemn thing that he who had opened his house to the Lord was refusing completely to open his heart to the grace that was in the Lord.

Simon failed to see that the very thing which he despised in the woman, that she was a sinner, was the very ground upon which he might receive the grace that was available to him. It is, as we see in the Roman epistle, unmerited favour on the principle of grace.

Man is looking for something in which he can boast, but we know that boasting is excluded.

Grace was available for Simon, but he was not prepared to accept it, but this is the attitude of God, illustrated in the subject which is engaging us, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them".

A creditor who frankly forgives all his debtors would quickly begin to feel the cost, but the wonderful free-hearted giving of our God does not impoverish Him! He is rich in mercy, rich in grace, and there are the riches of that grace in evidence. We speak sometimes of Luke 7 as setting forth the *grace of God*; Luke 10 *the riches of His grace*; and Luke 15 the *glory of His grace*, but certainly the riches of grace were available in the passage before us.

A question was asked earlier as to the results of reconciliation. We can see from Luke 7 that one result is that God secured the love of His creature — "she loved much". It was the grace of God that drew it out.

Was it possible for anyone to be in the good of reconciliation before the Lord rose from the dead?

Reconciliation, which involves being brought back to God with every stain removed, could only be as a result of the cross, but it does say that, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself", and we see from His ministry how that, on every hand, the Lord was showing that *attitude* to man before He actually completed the work that was necessary for its accomplishment.

We have sought to show the necessity of differentiating between the "Word of Reconciliation" and the "Ministry of Reconciliation". In the epistles the Holy Spirit gives to us the "Word of Reconciliation", but the Word of Reconciliation is known in greater power as we see the Ministry of Reconciliation displayed in Christ in His movements here in grace.

We might read 2 Corinthians 5 and be unable to understand fully the terms used, but in Luke 7 we can thank God that we have demonstration of the thing itself in Christ.

This woman, although knowing nothing of the doctrine of Colossians or Ephesians, was yet a living example of what the Lord had come to accomplish. She was before Simon as an example of what God was doing in Christ. He was showing the very thing for which He had come into this world, not the expulsion of man, but his recovery.

It would be well to remember that we do not in this chapter have the full thought as seen in Luke 15. Here is a woman of the city who needed forgiveness; we see the ground upon which she obtained it, and the pouring out of her heart's affection to the Lord.

The great thing we should notice is the attitude of the Lord Himself; He showed grace to both, and if there was one who missed it, let us thank God that we, like the woman, have received it.

Would this be in line with John 3, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that

the world through Him might be saved"?

That is obviously what is coming out here.

In what way were they debtors?

It is, surely, a picture of man as having sinned against God, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God".

Although we are now considering one of the most elementary aspects of reconciliation, the incident seems to open the door wide to this wonderful expression of "loving much".

That is a point we need to get hold of, what the effect of reconciliation is. Could there be a greater one than this? It charms our hearts to see that what God desires more than all else is the responsive love of His creature.

The first thing the devil did in the garden of Eden was to plant distrust of God in the heart of man, and lack of affection followed distrust. We see in this chapter how that affection was recovered.

Would you say that with the Pharisee there was the feature of distrust?

In the heart of every man at a distance from God there is the thought that God is in some way against him.

Simon had no true appreciation of the position in which he was. He did not think he needed the free grace of God, he thought he had earned His blessing. The deeper our impression of the grace of God and the blessing that grace brings to us, the greater will be our response of love to Him. The Lord indicated that in telling Simon, "Thou hast rightly judged".

How do we show our love to Christ today?

We have spoken of this woman's faith being justified by her works, and surely we show our love for Him in the way we serve Him; it may be in the way we praise Him. The greatest thing that can mark any of us is devotion to Him. Perhaps we may quote the verse "They which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again".

In verse 47 the Lord, in speaking to Simon, says "Her sins, which are *many*, are forgiven". This is a different word from that used in verse 42. It indicates the complete putting away of her sins. We know that that involved His work on the cross.

What are we to gather from the Lord's words, "Her sins . . . are forgiven her; for she loved much"?

She knew that she had been forgiven much, and as a result she loved much. However far we may get on in the things of God, we need ever to remember the mercy which brought to us the forgiveness of sins. Paul towards the end of his pathway, in the epistles he wrote to Timothy, shows that he never forgot that he was a subject of the sovereign mercy of God.

The Lord did not speak to the woman about her love, when speaking to her He mentioned her faith; it was to the Pharisee that He discoursed upon the woman's love.

That would give us to see that what is available now in Christ in relation to reconciliation is available only to faith.

It was not what she *did to the Lord* that gave her settled peace, although He greatly valued it.

Would it be right in the preaching of the gospel to preach something deeper than what we have here — justification, etc.?

Of course justification does involve that sins are forgiven, and that we are righteous in the sight of God. A person cannot be right with God if his sins are still upon him, but in our gospel preachings we should not venture too far into these deeper truths, we should have the blessing of the unsaved in view.

If we had a deeper sense of the mercy which met us in our hopeless condition, would not the feature of "loving much" be more evident?

Paul preached "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ". Perhaps John Baptist's preaching had affected this woman; and not only was repentance seen with her, but the One whom John Baptist pointed to was before her, and her faith in Him was manifest.

Will the expression of real affection for the Lord always produce opposition? It did in this incident and also in that of Mary anointing His feet.

It brings to light that which was in the hearts of those who had no appreciation of what was displayed in Christ. Judas led the opposition in Bethany but, sad to say, the disciples also came under the power of it.

How beautiful is the language of verse 49, "And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" Who dares to say that the debt has gone? But the Lord turned to the woman and said "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace". Thus, added to the knowledge of the forgiveness of her sins is the possession of salvation. These are wonderful steps on the line of reconciliation — the forgiveness of sins and salvation. But, let us ever remember that we are *saved for God*.

It is interesting to note that the woman did not say anything. We have no need to justify ourselves in answer to the opposition, the Lord has taken everything upon Himself in relation to our blessing.

"It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?"

What peace must have filled that woman's heart as she left that house, and what an appreciation she would have of the grace of God! It has been well said that peace is a state of things into which nothing can intrude to disturb.

Luke 10: 25-37.

When reading chapter 7 we saw that the guilt of man on the ground of human responsibility was mainly in view. In the verses we have now read we see not only the guilt of man but the state that underlay that guilt. In Luke 7 we see a woman who moved and who herself did certain things, whereas in Luke 10 we find a man who cannot do a single thing to help himself. And, by keeping the incidents distinct we can see more clearly that Christ has dealt not only with the guilt of man, but also with his state. We see from the parable, in answer to the question raised by the lawyer as to what a man *can do*, that the Lord indicates that whatever is needed to be done must be done by this "certain Samaritan". There will be confusion of mind and but a partial entrance into the joy of deliverance if these truths are not held as distinct. It has pleased the Spirit of God to relate these separate incidents, and if He has thus kept them distinct we should seek to get the distinctive teaching of each. We are wise in taking up a Scripture in the way the Spirit of God presents it, and thus we obtain a clearer understanding of the Word. Men at a distance from God may be conscious of their guilt, but it is certain that none are conscious of their *state of alienation* from God until a work has been done by God Himself in the soul. The woman in chapter 7 was conscious of her guilt, but in this chapter we see a man unable to arrive at anything at all, he is absolutely helpless by the wayside.

So that in the one case we find guilt driving the woman to Christ, but in the other we have a state that could only be met by Christ Himself, as seen in the Samaritan coming to the man.

It is important to see that the lawyer asked two questions. The answer to the first question exposed the complete helplessness of man, the second necessitated the Lord presenting Himself as able to meet the whole case. "Who is my neighbour?" could only be answered by the Lord's presenting Himself in the character of this "certain Samaritan". The only way in which we can understand true neighbourly features is as we see them presented in Christ.

There can be little doubt that this man, being a lawyer and well acquainted with the law of Moses, would know that there *was* such a thing as living an endless life on the earth. The question is often raised as to what is meant by eternal life in this passage. It is certainly not what we now know to be eternal life as brought in by the Son of God. He would have in his mind the thought of endless life *on this earth*, as presented in Psalm 133 and in Daniel 12. His enquiry was as to what he could do in order that he might not die, but continue to live here under the blessing of God.

Are those the only two places in the Old Testament where this thought appears?

They are the only two places where we have the term "life for evermore" or its equivalent. Psalm 133 reads "there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore"; and in Daniel 12 it is put in contrast to death, some are to be raised to "everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt". It would appear that endless life *on the earth* is what is in view in each of these passages. In the New Testament where the Lord, in John 6, speaks of believers availing themselves of the bread of life, saying "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you? (verse 53), He is referring to "that eternal life, which was with the Father". But in the same chapter He also says to the Jews, "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and *are dead*, . . . if any many eat of this bread, he shall live for ever". Obviously if we have eternal life we shall live for ever, but living or ever is not quite the same as eternal life.

Life for evermore, as mentioned in the two Old Testament Scriptures referred to, would be limited to the thought of duration, whereas the thought of eternal life in the New Testament suggests the character of that life.

It must be so because the Father had not yet been revealed. John 17: 3 reads, "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee . . . and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent". Therefore it could not be eternal life as we know it that the Lord speaks of in His answer to the lawyer; indeed He does not say "eternal life", but "This do, and thou shalt live".

We must be clear in seeing that the *character* of eternal life as presented in the New Testament includes the thought of *duration* which is presented in the Old.

The only answer the lawyer made when the Lord said "This do, and thou shalt live", was an endeavour to justify himself. He appears to have had but a face value of the law which he could quote. If we allow our thoughts to move in a legal sphere we at once attempt to justify ourselves; the only way to be delivered from the principle of self-justification is to get into the realm where grace is known. The lawyer was content to continue in a legal atmosphere indicated by his words "What must I *do*?"

This section seems to bring into sharp contrast the difference between law and grace. The lawyer was really tempting the Lord as to His orthodoxy, and his question brings into sharp relief the difference between the dispensation of law and that which was coming in as marked by grace.

Another point we ought to notice is that in this parable the Lord does not go back to the law only. He

goes far beyond it, and brings to light that while the lawyer was concerned with principles of the law, he had to learn that the law did not come in to give life to man, but to prove what his state was long before the law came in. The law did not produce that state but it most definitely brought it to light.

It was a ministration of death.

That would appear to be the point in mind, We must remember that the law did not bring death upon man. Paul is very clear as to that in Romans 5, "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression". Death was in the world from the outset, the law only intensified it. Paul again said that if the law had not said "Thou shall not covet" he had not known lust, "for sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me".

There was no provision made under the law to meet a case like that presented to us in Luke 10. Neither the priest nor the Levite was able to help, indeed both the priest and the Levite would have been defiled if they had touched this man.

Would this incident take our thoughts back to the question "where art thou?" asked by God of Adam in the garden of Eden? Both there and in Luke 10 we see man in a state which necessitates the intervention of God.

The beginning of this parable indicates a man *going down*, his back upon God, his face towards destruction, for Jericho had come under the curse of God.

What would the thieves represent?

They are robbers. Man in turning his back upon God was found in a state of which Satan took full advantage, and he robbed man of all that he had, bringing death upon him as the result of what he had done. Luke 10 would show not only what man has done in departing from God, but also man's wrong position in relation to God as a consequence.

It has been well said that whilst by his act of disobedience man gained the knowledge of good and evil, with that knowledge he only learned how prone he was to evil and how impossible it was to do good.

The very fact that the priest passed by on the other side did but intensify the hopelessness of this man's position. There was nothing the priest could do to help a man in this condition, it was entirely beyond anything that Judaism could provide. His condition is suggestive of the state in which man was before there was any law at all. Hence it was manifest that the priest was helpless to do anything for a man in this condition, so of necessity he passed on. The priest can do nothing for a man whose back is turned on God.

Is not this incident representative of the whole state of man even if the law had not been given?

That is what we are pressing; the matter goes right back to the garden of Eden.

The lawyer was acquainted with the law of Moses, and hoped to inherit eternal life by law-keeping. But he had to learn that the law had no power to give life, even life in the way in which he speaks of it, that is living for ever on the earth. The life which we have is life in Christ, and the power of that life is in the Holy Spirit.

Eternal life as we know it today is in God's Son, "He that hath the Son hath life". Saints in Old Testament days did not have the Son. Doubtless they will be brought into it eventually, but the eternal life which is in the Son was never in this world until the Son brought it here.

The state of man in relation to God is being stressed in our reading. Why then both here and in chapter

18, where we have a similar question as to inheriting eternal life, does the Lord's answer deal more with an attitude to one's neighbour rather than an attitude toward God?

In the failure of man's attitude to his neighbour the heart of man is completely exposed. We cannot discern whether there is love to God in one another's heart, but we can discern whether there is love towards the neighbour. It thus manifests man's complete failure on the principle of law.

The apostle John puts it in his own way by saying that "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Right relations with our brethren would be the proof of right relations with God.

The parable was not really an answer to the lawyer's question as to what he should do, but an answer to his question, "Who is my neighbour?", and in the answer we have a wonderful manifestation of the compassions of God in Christ.

If neither the priest nor the Levite could do anything for the man, it is perfectly evident that this Samaritan brought everything with him.

That is the point we need to reach, not only to see the weakness of both the priest and the Levite, but to see the complete service in compassion of the Samaritan.

That is the point we need to be occupied with, not the ineffectiveness of the law, nor the poverty of the man, but the resources that came in with the Samaritan. He brought everything that was necessary, and in compassion took full charge of the situation. The priest was on the line of demand, but the man had nothing to *give* — he had lost all he had. The Levite was on the line of works, it was his duty to teach Israel God's law — but the man is half dead and there was nothing he could *do*. He could not be in a worse state than that in which he was, and it was this that drew out the compassion of the Samaritan.

What is suggested in the fact that he "came where he was"?

There are three movements to be noted in relation to the Samaritan. The first is that he was definitely on a journey; secondly, he "came where he was"; and thirdly, in verse 34, he "went to him". Perhaps the "journey" would suggest to us the Lord's down-stooping into Manhood in this world; coming to "where he was" may refer to the various incidents in His pathway as He manifested forth the grace of God in its movements of blessing towards man; whereas when he went to him", to bind up his wounds and effect his complete recovery, would perhaps involve the cross itself.

There is a wonderful touch of grace in the fact that the Lord took up the thought of a Samaritan, for in the ninth chapter we read that a village of the Samaritans had refused Him. It is one of those precious incidents we have in Luke of the amazing grace and humility of the Lord Jesus.

Luke begins his gospel with a similar thought. The Lord's birth was at Bethlehem, later He went to Nazareth where He was brought up. He did not come forth from the temple or from the system in which the priest and the Levite were, He was morally outside of that system. Yet as in that outside, despised position He was the only One capacitated to help those represented by this man.

So that in these three movements we see something of the blessedness of the "ministry of reconciliation". It must inevitably involve the cross itself if man's state was to be adequately dealt with and man himself completely recovered for God.

We sometimes sing together of that journey of love:-

Came from Godhead's fullest glory

Down to Calvary's depths of woe,

Now on high, we bow before Thee;

Streams of praises ceaseless flow!

How beautiful that verse expresses God's movements towards us in Christ, and the wonderful result in responsive praise.

In John 8: 48 the Jews taunted the Lord by saying, "Thou art a Samaritan".

They also said, "And hast a devil", a matter which the Lord at once refuted, but He accepted the outside place of a "Samaritan" in order to show that no one in Judaism, or anything that that system could produce was able to do anything for this helpless man; it needed someone entirely outside of it if relief was to be made available.

In the complete recovery of the man do we see an instance of the Lord's undoing the work of the devil?

I am sure that is so!

An aged brother, now with the Lord, made a suggestion in regard to this chapter that appeals to one. He thought that in these few details we get an opening out of what is included in many sections of the New Testament. Coming to the man he thought would suggest — *the gospels*; binding up his wounds — *the cross*; pouring in the oil and the wine — *the Acts of the apostles*; setting him on his beast — *Romans*, particularly chapters 6, 7 and 8; taking him to an inn — *Corinthians*; and His promise to come again — *Thessalonians*.

It is apparent that once having taken the man's case in hand, this Samaritan made himself completely chargeable for him. He gave the inn-keeper the privilege of caring for him for a time, but indicated that he was himself still interested in and responsible for him.

One cannot help but think that this place where the man would be safely cared for has the Assembly in view. It is surely where we find ourselves through grace, and where we are cared for in a spiritual sense.

In verse 34 it is the Samaritan who "took care of him", whereas in verse 35 the inn-keeper is enjoined to "take care of him". Perhaps verse 34 might suggest the Lord's care for His own while He remained here, and consequent upon His ascension His interests are now in the hands of the Holy Spirit.

We can all truly say that since the Lord first put His blessed hand upon us He has cared for us in a most wonderful way, and has provided those who have watched for our souls. Many of us can look back and thank God for godly men and women who have had our spiritual welfare definitely at heart.

Reverting to the doctrinal side for a moment. By the time the man arrived at the inn everything he had was the provision of the Samaritan, all he had previously had gone. Would not this connect with the chapter we have already quoted, 2 Corinthians 5, where we read "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;" or, there is a new creation, "old things are passed away; behold, *all things are become new*. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself"? Here we are today, and all that we have is through the blessing of God in reconciliation, "and all things are of God".

Peter gives us a very good word at the opening of his second epistle, "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue".

The Lord's last words to the lawyer were, "Go, and do thou likewise". If the Lord has done all this for us we ought to take this exhortation to heart, the carrying out of which would be an evidence that one is really in the enjoyment of eternal life.

Would the enjoyment of reconciliation produce not only response to God, but also a portion for the neighbour?

Yes! That would surely result.

Thus the Lord completely answers the lawyer's question, "What shall I do?" in saying "Go and do thou likewise".

In seeking to carry out this exhortation we have no need to search for opportunities, "the neighbour" would be he who is nearest to us. If we see an immediate need our exercise should be to show mercy to that needy person, for that is the way God Himself is moving today.

Emphasis is laid on the Lord's repaying, "I" (the word in the New translation is emphatic), "I will render to thee". The Lord makes Himself completely responsible for all that is necessary for the care of His own; he may delegate it to others, and others may take it up in the power of the Spirit, but we can be assured that the Lord Himself will always see to the care of His own. The love which took Him to Calvary is the love that is manifested now in His service to His own.

It was rightly remarked earlier that there should be some practical evidence in our movements that reconciliation has taken place with us, and what better proof could there be that we are right with God than the love and care that we can bestow upon one another whenever the need may arise?

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3: 14).

LUKE 14: 12-24.

In previous readings we have been occupied with the public ministry of our Lord, In Luke 7, in regard to the woman in Simon the Pharisee's house, we saw how He dealt with the question of man's *guilt*; and in Luke 10 we had the way in which He dealt with the *state* in which man was found. In the section now before us we have the outgoing of the glad tidings. Demonstration of the Lord's ability to deal with both the guilt and the state of man having been made, the invitation now goes out in order that men might avail themselves of what God has for them in blessing. Perhaps we could first consider with profit the section in which we have certain sayings of our Lord Himself before He began to speak the actual parable. It is obvious that, in His words to the one who invited Him into his house, the Lord is stressing the motives that should have marked such a person, and in so doing He is expressing the character of God Himself. In Romans 4 we read "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt", and in the very words the Lord spoke to this man, He shows that if the invitation is to be according to the mind of God, it is one that looks for no merit in or return from the recipient, but is for the acceptance of someone really in need.

Is the Lord teaching here that mutuality is suitable to the family, but that grace becomes the kingdom?

It is remarkable that one of them that sat at meat should have raised the matter of the kingdom of God. Perhaps some little light of what the Lord was showing had entered his mind, hence his rather apt remark.

Would you think that this man could see the kingdom of God?

We must ever be ready to recognize the sovereign work of God in regard to persons, but these verses primarily show to us God in His attitude toward men, rather than His work *in* men. It is God's own provision.

Verses 12, 13, 14 would show the unique character of the gospel, and definitely stamps the

proclamation as coming from God. God is not needing recompense, His grace comes out to those who are not only unable to merit it but quite unable to give anything to secure it.

As the Lord watched the attitudes of those in the Pharisee's house He was doubtless grieved in His spirit. He was the One who had come down in humility and in grace, and these were seeking the high places for themselves.

What is being clearly demonstrated in the chapter is that the principle operating in the kingdom of God is *grace*, grace going out to those who have no claim whatsoever upon it.

Having brought the principle of free grace before the man who invited Him, the Lord adds (verse 14), "And thou shalt be blessed". Now while the Lord said that to the man that invited Him, it is a word for every one of us, and it is a setting forth in some measure of the thing that God Himself has done. This man might have turned round and said, "Yes, but who *does* act like this?" The parable is the wonderful answer, showing as it does the blessed movements of God in His grace.

Would it be too much to say that God Himself will have a recompense in the resurrection of the just?

We *do* bless God today, but what a wonderful answer to His grace will be seen in the coming day!

In the first chapter of Paul's first epistle to Timothy we have the testimony which has been committed to the house of God and the features of that testimony ought to characterize all who compose that house; that is, the house itself is to be characterized by the testimony given to it.

If the earlier part of the chapter we are considering discloses the character of man, the parable itself unfolds to us the character of God.

The parable in Luke 10 follows the comments by the lawyer; the parable of the two debtors in chapter 7 was a reply to the thoughts of Simon, and the parable we are now considering is a complete exposure of the condition of the men who were sitting at the feast. Against these different backgrounds the Lord is bringing to light the attitude of God in grace.

In verse 15 we read, "And when one of them that sat at meat with Him *heard these things*, he said unto Him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God". A perfectly right statement, suggesting that something of the blessedness of the Lord's words had been brought home to him.

Doubtless the only aspect of the kingdom this man could have contemplated was the kingdom according to prophecy as under the sway of God's Anointed, in what we understand to be the world-to-come; a time when the will of God will be manifestly supreme.

The Lord had said, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just", and that promise apparently caused the man to speak as he did.

Are you suggesting that this man, in regarding the Lord, saw in *Him* the kingdom?

He evidently recognized that the Lord Jesus was completely reversing the order obtaining in man's house. Who has the right to reverse the order in man's house? Here was One Who was actually rebuking the man who had invited all there; by His utterances He is showing that everything needs to be adjusted, and He is introducing principles entirely opposite to those already existing. Who is this One? He *must* be the Christ, and it would appear that the man speaking of the kingdom recognized, in perhaps but a feeble measure, that there was authority as well as grace in the Lord.

The point we need to stress is, that in setting forth the principles He mentions in verses 7 to 14, the Lord was introducing something that completely reversed the principles which dominate men.

As we read this chapter we see a blessed Man who had *everything* in His hands. He had the ability to entirely expose the thoughts and actions of men, but He was also able to reveal the outflowing of the heart of God in grace. There will be the answer to that outflowing of grace in the coming kingdom from the hearts of all who have availed themselves of it, and in that day the Lord alone will be exalted. Men were exalting themselves in Luke 14, as they are today, but the place of exaltation belongs to Christ alone, the One who has disclosed to men the character of the heart of God.

The parable commencing at verse 16 is not only an answer to the man's assertion but a word, without doubt, to everyone at that table. "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many". We can see that what we have here is a picture of the gospel going out to men. We have remarked that the Lord's movements, in Luke 10: 33, involved the work upon the cross and now we have the testimony in relation to that finished work. What we have here in parable form actually took place as recorded in the book of the Acts.

Why in Matthew do we have a king making a supper for his son, whilst here it is "a certain man"?

Matthew being, as we well know, the kingdom gospel, we have there presented the celebration of the kingdom established by God's Anointed who, according to the prophetic word, is the Son of David; clearly a dispensational thought. In Luke it is more the thought of God making a supper to which the guests must be compelled.

Each presentation is in accord with the particular gospel; "a king" is certainly in keeping with the Messianic gospel; whereas "a certain man" is in accord with the way in which Christ is presented in Luke, where we have the movements of God displayed in a blessed Man.

Would the servant — in the singular throughout — refer to the Holy Spirit?

Yes! That is why reference has been made to the Acts, which could perhaps be called "the Acts of the Holy Spirit" — although the apostles were the instruments used.

The inclusion of the word "many" (verse 16) gives to us a wonderful disclosure of the grace of the heart of God. It would no doubt refer to the proclamation of the glad tidings as recorded in the second chapter of the Acts — where the *whole nation* is invited to repentance. We have three separate invitations in the parable, verses 17, 21 and 23. The first would link with the Acts of the Apostles from chapter 2 to the stoning of Stephen in chapter 7, where the testimony is to the Jews. It was they who were first bidden in verse 17. In the stoning of Stephen we see the complete refusal by the Jews of the testimony presented to them, and the confirmation of another parable which we have later in this gospel, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19: 14).

It is worthy of note that the Lord speaks of this supper as "a great supper".

There would appear to be two "great suppers" only, this one and the one mentioned in Revelation chapter 19. Both are *great suppers*, one expressing infinite grace, the other righteous judgment. Levi made a "great feast", but the term "great supper", so far as we know, is used in these two chapters only.

The chapter shows that those invited had different excuses, but they had one thing in common. That is, they would not answer to the divine appeal. Many suggestions have been made regarding these three excuses, but in effect man's heart has not changed since the time of the garden of Eden. These men were doing exactly what Adam did; Adam hid behind the trees which were the mercies of God to him. Here we have the mercies of God again, and those invited to the supper were using the very mercies given to them by God to hide away from Him. It is sadly true *today* that men will use the very mercies that God Himself has given to them as an excuse for refusing the gospel.

"All things are now ready" (verse 17). What do the things refer to?

If in this chapter we have the "*great supper*", Hebrews 2: 3 refers to the "*great salvation*", a matter "which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord". Why is it *great*? Is it not because of the absolute completeness of it as that in which God Himself is eternally glorified, and every need of man eternally met? The "great supper" is characterized by the greatness of the person who provides it, and so is the "great salvation".

You are suggesting that this first invitation would be exclusively to the Jews?

It would suggest the testimony rendered in Jerusalem itself; they were the people who first of all were bidden to this feast. The Lord's ministry never went beyond the confines of Judaism; it did go to the northern point of Palestine but never beyond it, and the disciples were instructed to begin their testimony at Jerusalem.

There were those who accepted the invitation, as we see in Acts 2 and 3, but *nationally* they said "We will not come". When the Lord was on earth they rejected Him, and afterwards Stephen had to say to them "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost". What more could God do with that nation?

The solemn thing in this parable is that it is the one who provided the supper who is angry, not the servant who carried the invitations, but it did not hinder the feast, God does not close the door.

On what ground is the nation of Israel received back again?

Two things are said of them in the 11th chapter of Romans; they are "Beloved for the fathers' sakes", and "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance"; He is pleased to act in the sovereignty of His mercy.

Would you say that the nation is rejected or set aside?

The nation as such will never taste of *this supper*, even when they are brought back again. Heavenly blessings have been made available to them, but they refused the One in whom they were presented, and so they will never taste of this supper. Israel *as a nation* will be brought into an *earthly* possession, whereas those who have accepted this invitation will be found in the *heavenly* company.

The cursing of the fig tree would assure us that on the *ground of responsibility* all was lost, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever" (Matthew 21: 19). That is a solemn word; it is their *national* doom.

In verse 21 we read, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city". That would appear to cover the book of the Acts 8 to 12. In Acts 8: 1 we read, "Saul was consenting unto his (Stephen's) death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria" They have not yet gone out of the city, but have reached the very outskirts, for Samaria was still in the land. This movement of the testimony is most remarkable, for it developed historically in the book of the Acts in the very order indicated by the Lord in this parable.

It was in the lanes of the city, when the Lord was in Samaria, that He found the poor, the lame, the halt and the blind. These were needy souls who knew their need, and gladly came into the feast when they were bidden. The thought of compelling does not come in until verse 23. These were people who were in desperate need of blessing from God, and gladly availed themselves of His overtures of mercy.

If the nation as such refused God's offer, there were many needy souls in the land who would accept it. Surely this would forcibly remind us that God will see to it that there is an adequate answer to the work

of Christ on the cross?

Inverse 23 we have the last invitation to the supper, and historically this connects with the movement which commences in Acts 13.

The invitation now broadens out, and the word is "compel them to come in, that My house may be filled".

The testimony thus goes out as God intended it should. There is room for the Gentile, those outside of the city, and even outside the lanes and streets of the city in the highways and hedges, outside of the ordered system altogether; from Acts 13 to the end of the book we see God's good news presented to such.

What are we to gather from the thought of compelling them to come in?

The people to whom the first and second invitations were sent had some knowledge of the true God however poorly they may have responded to it, but the outcasts of the Gentiles had no knowledge of the true God, an example of which we see at Athens where they erected an altar to "the unknown God". Thus we have the proclamation of the gospel going out in the compelling power of the Spirit of God, drawing men into the light and favour of God as He is known today through Christ.

The commission to Paul was threefold. He was "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God".

The first two invitations were addressed to those who stood in a privileged position. They were the children of Abraham so far as their natural genealogy was concerned, but the gospel has now gone beyond them. They refused it and it has gone out to a people who were "strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2: 12). We also read "That Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to *confirm* the promises made unto the fathers". Note that word "confirm". They stood in relationship to God, but the chapter goes on to say, "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy" (Rom. 15: 8, 9); not for His promises but for His mercy. That is the bearing of the expression "compel them to come in".

The whole matter is concisely stated in the last chapter of the Acts where the Jews refused the testimony that Paul rendered in his own hired house, and he says, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed".

If at the end of Luke 13 the Lord has to say of that privileged nation, "*Your* house is left unto you desolate", how blessed to read in Luke 14 the beautiful words "That *My* house may be filled".

LUKE 15: 1-14.

In previous readings we have noticed the attitude of the Lord Himself as expressed in His words and His works of grace, and have connected it with the *ministry of reconciliation*. In Luke 14 we saw the going out of the glad tidings, "Come, for all things are now ready", and in that testimony we have the *word of reconciliation*. We saw in the Acts of the Apostles the proclamation of the glad tidings subsequent to the work of Christ upon the cross. And this would indicate to us that which Paul said had been particularly given, not only to himself but also to the other apostles, as part of the word of reconciliation, telling men that on the ground of the work that Christ had accomplished they could be brought back to God.

In chapter 15 there is a summing up of all the other chapters that have been before us. We have here a threefold parable. In the Shepherd seeking the lost sheep — we have God's gracious answer to the guilt of man as seen in Luke 7. In the woman searching the house — the state of man (Luke 10) as lost and recovered through divine seeking. Whilst in the younger son who, we may say, heeded the invitation to "Come; for all things are now ready" — we find both of these things taken account of, his guilt and state met in divine grace so that the Father might have him back happily in His presence. We ought also to notice that in the servant going forth with the word "Come; for all things are now ready", we have a suggestion of the Holy Spirit, in whose power the apostles made the proclamation known. In line with the first chapter of Colossians we here find the Son, the Spirit and the Father, each with His own particular work, and can thus discern the great interest of the Godhead in the recovery of man for the divine pleasure. It is blessed for us to contemplate that the source of the whole matter was the desire of God to recover man for Himself. In order to bring that about the Son comes in incarnation; and to produce an effect from this coming in the hearts of men the Spirit is still operating in the world today. God finding His joy in the recovery of his creature man.

When we speak of being recovered to God, there is no suggestion that we are brought back to the state of innocence seen in Adam, but we are brought back to God in reconciliation on perfectly new ground.

Man did belong originally to God, for he was created by Him, but in being recovered on the basis of redemption a new order of sonship has been introduced as we shall see as we proceed.

In Malachi we read "Have we not all one Father?", but the Scripture goes on to say, "Hath not one God created us?" (Mal. 2: 10). Obviously this refers to the relationship in creation. Is not the overruling thought that God had lost man's affections? In this chapter we see how He recovers them. It is not so much what man is brought back to, but what God Himself has recovered.

Would the repetition of the word "lost" indicate that God was missing the affection of man?

Perhaps we ought to emphasize that. The chapter seems to suggest that the end in view is the rejoicing of divine Persons in what They have recovered for Themselves.

There is, too, an historical order in this chapter. The first part of the parable, where we read of the shepherd going after the lost sheep, would refer to the work of Christ. The rest of the chapter really hangs upon that. In the incident of the woman searching for the piece of silver we see the work of the Spirit, and as the result of the work of Christ and of the Spirit, we have the reception by the Father Himself of one who is made suitable for His house.

What do the ninety and nine represent?

They would no doubt be those of the nation who had no sense of their need, with the result that they are never brought into the blessing seen in this chapter. Probably the Pharisees themselves were in the Lord's mind. The whole parable is a justification of the Lord's attitude in receiving the "publicans and sinners".

In that connection the beginning of the chapter is important. These people were drawing near to Him, and whilst the parable shows the Lord seeking the sinner, it commences with the thought of sinners drawing near to Him.

Does not the parable stress the thought that that which was lost was of value to the owner? "My sheep which was lost"; "the piece which *I* had lost"; "My son". Hence there is the rejoicing on the part of the One who recovers that which had been lost.

What does the house suggest? The sheep having been found the shepherd did not return it to the

wilderness, but brought it to the "house" (New Trans.).

That is one of the points we ought to notice. Whilst there is the feature of recovery throughout the parable, there is something special in relation to each section. So that the recovered sheep is brought to a position beyond anything it had been in before. He brings it *home*.

In John chapter 10 we have in contrast to the fold, "one flock, one Shepherd" (v. 17, New Trans.). That is something new which was not known in Judaism.

What is conveyed in the thought of carrying the sheep "on his shoulders"?

It would perhaps be similar to what there is in the tenth chapter, where we find that the power is supplied by the Samaritan's own beast. So in this chapter the shepherd makes himself responsible for the sheep all the way home.

With regard to the expression in verses 6 and 9, "Rejoice with me". One has thought that this may refer to the Father and the Holy Spirit rejoicing in the work of the Son in verse 6; and the Father and the Son rejoicing in the work of the Spirit in verse 9; "let *us* eat and be merry" (verse 23) would be the Father, Son and Holy Ghost rejoicing together. Doubtless there is a joy into which we also are brought, but these verses seem to indicate the distinctive joy of the Persons in the Godhead in the recovery of man for Their pleasure.

It is clear that divine Persons are active, working for Their own pleasure, and rejoicing together in the results secured.

In considering the movements of the younger son (verse 13) we see that which is indicative of man who, receiving the bountiful mercies of God and using them in self gratification at a distance from God, finds himself entirely destitute of joy and happiness.

Looking at this from a doctrinal point of view we see man's utter depravity in the first chapter of Romans, before we have the manifestation of what God is doing in His grace. If man turns his back on God it must result in his depravity, but we see in Luke 15, and also in the epistles, that when God in His grace effects man's recovery, He has in mind a condition of blessing beyond anything that man knew previously.

God in His movements of grace has the whole of mankind in view. The early chapters of Romans show all to be unprofitable, and the whole world "guilty before God". Then from the middle of Romans 3 we have the line of recovery introduced from God's side, and the result in Romans 8 is that those recovered through God's operations in grace are to be "conformed to the image of His Son".

In the Acts of the Apostles we find the representatives of the three branches of mankind — Ham, Japheth and Shem — brought into a position that they never enjoyed before. When the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing", he had a new sense of joy in his heart; and when Cornelius came under the power of the gospel through Peter he saw things in a way in which he had never seen them before. He was a pious, praying man but he did not know the power of the Spirit until he believed the gospel which Peter preached. Saul of Tarsus was a man who was advanced in Judaism beyond his contemporaries, but as receiving the grace of God he was brought into that which outshone all that he had ever known. Thus we see that God is not only recovering man from his lost condition but also introducing him to that which was in His own heart for man. In the theme before us we rejoice in a love which not only takes account of man's need and meets that need, but brings him into suitability for the presence of God for God's own joy and delight.

What are we to learn from the fact that whilst the lost sheep and the lost piece of silver are picked up in

their lost condition, the younger son moves towards his father?

That question brings us back to the doctrinal thought. Following the work of Christ as seen in the shepherd, we have the work of the woman which illustrates the movements of the Spirit of God. The expression in verse 17 — "when he came to himself" — would indicate the subjective effect of the Spirit's work in the heart of the believer. The first movement in any one of us towards God was not of ourselves; there was a complete change from the moment when "he came to himself".

It was the thought of the goodness of his father that was operating in his heart. There was the famine on the one hand; he felt his hopeless condition, and his mind went back to the place where he knew his father would provide "enough and to spare".

If in Romans 1 we have the depravity that marked man, in Romans 2 we read that "the goodness of God leadeth . . . to repentance".

Repentance involves a true valuation of things. I could not have a true valuation of anything apart from a work of God in my soul. Hence we see the necessity for the work of the Spirit in the second part of the parable.

In the provision of the father's house is there any suggestion of what we saw in chapter 14, "All things are now ready"?

We hope to see in this chapter what some of those things are. In Luke 13 the Lord had to say to the Jews "Your house is left unto you desolate". We have God's house presented with its provision in Luke 14, and we hope to see something of that provision in Luke 15.

This younger son had some knowledge of what was in the father's house, but he did not know the blessedness of what was in the father's *heart* for him. Reconciliation does not comprise the bringing again of man to that which was lost in Eden, but the bringing of him to that which was ever in the purpose of God for man, the knowledge of His love in eternal conditions.

If God by His Spirit shows to us that we are bereft of everything as away from Himself, He delights also to show us another scene in which there is absolute fullness, the provision of His own love.

Perhaps we are only just beginning to find out what there is in the Father's house. According to Romans 1 man has *partial* knowledge of God, even the darkest pagan had some knowledge of God. So the son had *some* knowledge of what was in his father's house, but neither he nor ourselves knew the extent of blessing that was in God's mind for us until we came home to Him.

In 1 Corinthians 2: 9 we read, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him". It is only by the Spirit we have the knowledge of these wonderful things today.

There are three different words used for servants in this section. Whoever these hired servants may refer to, the younger son knew they were there and that they were amply satisfied in their service, whilst he was starving. It was that point to which he was brought, the consciousness of the dignity that *could* be his, and perhaps the dignity that once *had been* his, so that he says, "I will arise and go to my father". But he was in a far country, he was a long way off, how could he get back? If it was the Spirit's work that brought him to the state of self judgment, was it not because the Shepherd had gone *every step* in His seeking love, that this returning sinner can now take *every step* back again? Love has made the way clear.

In relation to the sheep and to the silver, it is evident that they were *out of sight* until they were found,

but in relation to the son we are brought to the thought of the purpose of God, he was *never out of sight*.

In the compassions of his father he found a greater welcome than he could have expected; the father fell on his neck and *covered him with kisses*. Whilst he had of necessity to own his sin, saying "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son", he was *not* allowed to ask that he might be given the place of a servant.

What are we to learn in the further thought of the son being clothed? This follows the affectionate reception he had received from his father.

It has been said that we have the two sides of the gospel presented here. The father covering him with kisses would perhaps suggest Romans chapter 5, "Through whom now we have received the reconciliation" (verse 11, New Trans.) — the distance all removed. Then in 2 Corinthians 5 we see that reconciliation subserves new creation, and that is what would be seen in the things the father speaks of in Luke 15: 22, *things which were in reserve*. So that while forgiveness and the complete removal of all distance are the first great and necessary steps in reconciliation, what follows is our being made fit for the new position for the pleasure of God.

In reconciliation the distance has been *entirely removed*. Sometimes we hear about the distance being *bridged*, but if there were a bridge it would connect the new with the old, and this we sometimes try to do. As clothed in the best robe, the younger son would not be constantly speaking of that which he had previously worn! His conversation would surely be of the wonderful place in the affections of his father which he now had and which doubtless he appreciated. He knew the heart of his father in a way in which he had not known it before.

We need not conjecture what he was talking of. We read, "They began to be merry". He certainly would not be thinking of the rags and of the swine, for there was nothing in those things to cause merriment.

If, as has been suggested, the best robe indicates the thought of new creation, how could the servants put that on?

It is certainly the Holy Spirit who does the work, but He acts through the servants. However we must not assume to be in the good of new creation because we have heard the truth concerning it; the ministry would show what is really available for us.

It is quite evident that these servants knew where the best robe was. that would be a challenge to all those who seek to serve and help the saints!

At the outset of these readings we saw the truth of reconciliation presented to us in the gospel for our acceptance, "we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5: 20), but how many of us knew what we were really brought into as we obeyed that word? Hence the necessity of further ministry in order that we may be brought consciously into the blessedness of new creation, and the dignity of sonship as we are found near to God in reconciliation. Thus we can be at home in the Father's presence.

Whilst the necessity for forgiveness was there, it was with a view to clearing the ground in order that God might bring us into this completely new order of things in which we can enjoy the blessedness of that which His love provides as seen in verses 22 and 23.

There is the responsibility of the servants (verse 22), but it is by the work of the Spirit in our souls that we are brought into the good of new creation.

Is it not a fact that when we come to Christ all these blessings are ours?

We have sought to make that clear. These blessings are not the proprietary right of some special class of Christians; the servants through ministry do not *give us* these blessings, but they do help us into the joy and power of them.

Will you say once more what is the difference between the ministry of reconciliation and the word of reconciliation?

The *ministry* of reconciliation was seen in the movements and words of the Lord Jesus when here in this world He made known God's attitude to man. We read in John 3: 17 "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved". Again we have the words in John 8 of the Lord Himself, "Neither do I condemn thee"; He was "not imputing their trespasses unto them". In every detail of His service here He was manifesting the wonderful fact that He had come into the world to recover man for God; that is the *ministry* of reconciliation. Now, as to the *word* of reconciliation, we know that before any one of us could get the gain of what was expressed in the Lord's movements of love, His precious death was a necessity. He must die upon the cross, and now as the result of that work God has moved towards us in the gospel, as we see so plainly evidenced in the words of Paul, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5: 20). This is the *word* of reconciliation which he tells us in the previous verse God had committed to him.

The ministry of reconciliation is connected with Christ personally, whereas the word of reconciliation stands related to the movements of the Spirit through the apostles.

We have not considered verse 22 and 23 in detail, but doubtless they would bring before us the circle of divine affection of which we often sing, "Where love's treasures are displayed". The fatted calf would perhaps suggest a peace offering which, as we know, is the fellowship offering. For the remarkable thing is that we can actually enjoy fellowship with Father and with the Son, and thus enter into this circle of holy joy which the words, "Let us eat, and be merry" would suggest.