

Afternoon Lesson. Ephesians 4.

AUGUST 25 1974

TEXT ACTS 5 V 31

It will be right for me to name to the dear friends here assembled to day, the blessed concentration of truth in the body of Divinity in Peter's sermon, I can only hope ~~in two~~ in the two services on this holy Day to give you an introduction to. The subject matter is far beyond me to deal with in two services, so this is a prelude. You will already have observe how we have been particularly led in the morning in a subject that is very dear to the hearts of all who love the Lord; that is, to exalt Him.

You may freely say that Christ is exalted, and He is, in the highest heavens, the seat of glory and majesty. All the heavenly host adore Him exalted by the Father, and it is^a most sacred, celestial and blessed meditation to contemplate the adoration of the Son of God in our nature as He is exalted, adored by all the bright orders of heaven, - angels, archangels, and all the glorified saints who are safely landed on the happy shore. He is exalted, and we recognise it because some of us have

been led out as far as to Bethany, and there He has lifted up His holy hands and blessed us, and while He blessed us He was parted from us and carried up into heaven, out of sight. The unworthy preacher can testify to this. I know Christ is exalted. He has ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. I know He is exalted as a part of spiritual experience. Where do you go to find Him? to the sepulchre? "Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Where do you go to find Him? you more matured saints, or those who have been led deeply? You will go to His Throne. He is in heaven exalted. How do I know He is? Because He has given me the forgiveness of sins. No sinner would ever receive forgiveness of sins if the Lord had not accomplished His work of Atonement. Why does blessedness apply to you? and this in itself is a positive proof of; "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." Why is it you are blessed? Because there is no iniquity to impute: it was imputed to Christ; there is none to impute to you; it is gone, and this very fact will be a pregnant proof in your soul that He is risen, ascended, exalted. The whole area of the sacred organisation of the Church of Christ by the Spirit from Pentecost is a positive proof that He is exalted, "He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." All the blessings you receive prove that Christ is exalted, because the first step of His exaltation,- His resurrection, was a blessed, positive proof given us by the Father of the virtue and validity of His atonement. He would never have been raised from the tomb if His work was not accomplished. All He came to do,- to magnify the Law and restore honour to it; to expiate sin shed His vital blood; conquer death by dying;- all He came to do He accomplished gloriously, and the proof of the full glory, virtue and validity of the atonement is demonstrated in God raising Him from the dead. He is not dead; He is a living Christ. "Because I live, ye shall live also." That is how I know.

Let us go to the focal point, which is the holy initial. No one could receive life in their soul apart from the accomplished work of Christ and His resurrection. If He had remained in the tomb no sinner would be

quicken^{ed} into life. "He...hath quicken^{ed} together with Christ." "thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." We have begun on a personal and positive^{note} that we know He is risen and exalted, and this has become, and has ever been because it is congruous with the glory of God, His holy, righteous character and perfections, the theme of those who know and love and receive by faith that He is exalted. You in a unique sense have the holy joy and privilege of exalting Him below. To hear a blessed testimony of the work of the Spirit and forgiveness of sin and full gospel liberty is Christ-exalting in my soul, and it has remained with me. How do we know the reality of such a testimony? Because the Spirit exalts Christ in my soul. The sinner is nothing and yet something: Christ is All in all.

So how wonderful the theme of life is, - the exaltation of Christ. It is the same in the ministry. When a minister is anointed by the Spirit, and prior to this; when he knows in his soul complete deliverance, pardon, peace and marriage to Christ,- and I do not believe a minister is sent destitute of full deliverance. I am willing to leave the matter with God, but I do not see how a man can preach the fulness of the glorious gospel unless he has experienced this. It must be sad to preach to a congregation and go so far and have to stop because he has not known it. It is a thing discerning people have always watched carefully, not cynically, to see how far a minister goes. Does he preach the fulness of the gospel of Christ? does he lead you to justification and marriage to the Lamb? or does he leave you in the wilderness? Does he preach you into liberty, or leave you in ~~the wilderness~~ bondage? These are solemn things. There is an eclipsing desire, an impelling power that He is who is exalted on high by the Father should be lifted up in your souls. It is a heavenly thing. When He is exalted in your affections you join with the ransomed Church of God, the spirits of just men, angels, prophets, the host of heaven; all the blessed company of heaven in adoration. No ostentation is desirable. Some we have seen recently have spoken of Mr J.K.Popham. He was very quiet in delivery, very distinct; brilliant, no show. The whole point was, he wished to be out of sight. Let the people see Jesus only,

and it was not long before gracious hearts began to warm under his ministry because Christ was exalted. This is all. "Christ, whose glory fills the skies," begins to fill your heart when He is exalted. How clear the work of the Spirit is! All who have the work of the Holy Ghost find themselves in agreement;

"The more Thy glories strike my eyes
The humbler I shall lie;
Thus, while I sink, my joys shall rise
Unmeasurably high." (475)

You are in harmony. There is this; "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." He is exalted.

I want, by the grace of God, to continue in the introduction. I shall never get to the end of the Text in two services, so I leave it with God concerning future services. I feel to speak in this particular way. The next step is to trace out by the Holy Spirit, the circumstances as recorded by the first three evangelists and by the third in the first chapter of Acts,- the circumstances relating to Christ's ascension. I will bring to you one thought. He was a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; He descended to the lower parts of the earth. If you feel low, Christ went far lower than you. Poor soul, you never go as low as Christ. All His days He was despised and rejected of men, to the time when He said in holy triumph, "It is finished." and died voluntarily. All His days He was despised and rejected of men. "A servant, though the Lord of all." He had not where to lay His head. He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who has own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree;"

Against the background of His descent into the lower parts of the earth and two focal points will serve for our meditation. The lowest parts of the earth, - the virgin's womb and the sepulchre. O! you can never conceive of this; He abhorred not the virgin's womb,- the lowest parts of the earth,- and the sepulchre. He condescended to be buried. Do you feel you can be buried? Have you ever felt in your soul; "I can go where my Saviour went. If I find Him there it is safe for me."? The path you

tread will be made a blessed path because your Saviour trod it.

"Would they another lot prefer?

Rejected be the thought!

No; they will tread, while here below,

The path their Master trod;

Content all honour to forego,

But that which comes from God." (1013)

The bliss of it is inexpressible, to feel though you are discarded by men you are in great pain and suffering, you are near Christ; Christ is near you. This was the point: against this background, and because of it,- think of this; He is no longer a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. No: He is a Man of joy unspeakable. He is no longer in that sense within the reach of men who despise and reject Him. We may speak of the omnipresence of the Lord, and He feels all that is done to His people, but He is beyond the reach of His enemies. He no longer has not where to lay His head: He is no longer 'loaded with agonies' in His Passion. He is our Prince.

This is the concept to convey to you. He was a Prince when He suffered death. The glory of Christ is visible in the lowest part of His humiliation; the lustre of His glory shines from the cross. It is wonderful to "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," but He is exalted a Prince. You have a princely status if He is your Prince. This is enough to make you sing. He reigns; He is supreme; He has all power. You have a Prince. All that flows from Him is princely; love, grace, treasure, mansions, an inheritance. Can you look from self and think of Christ as exalted, delivered out of all His afflictions, no longer a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? He is exalted. My friends, as I have said, this is the pattern here for you. You will know while here below to tread a little of the same path that Christ trod. You will feel to be a man or a woman of sorrows: you will know strong crying and tears; you will feel despised and rejected of men. You will know of measurable fellowship with Him in His sufferings. There are things that must be lodged in the secret chambers of your breast. You will never be able to speak of the path you tread in the deepest part. Only the Lord

and you know, and you do not know fully. You will find a special drawing to some, not so much because of what they have said, but you feel in your heart they walk a measure of the path you do. This is a wonderful thing. If one factor encourages you it is often in a person following the Lord in His sacred ordinances. You may feel a special bond of love to one or two, or three. Ruth did to Naomi. I do not mean you will show favouritism, but there is a special bond because you walk more or less in the same path. If it is one in Christ this will be a great factor the Lord uses in bringing you in.

How wonderful to realise against this background, and because of it,- Christ's descent into the lower parts of the earth,- is His ascension, and for you. One day you will come up out of great tribulation, and have washed your robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and be before the Throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. Your status will be one of bliss, in the enjoyment of princely status. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." I want to deliver to you that this is your prospect, and it is against the background and because of what Christ suffered when He descended into the lower parts of the earth, and it is His sovereign will that you should taste what Christ suffered as your Surety. You will never suffer the wrath of God, but you will walk the path of suffering He has ordained for you. The devil tempted me before I came this morning, but I have felt so free. There are young friends in this path as well as older ones. They are in a path of sorrow, trial, tears. Against this background you will know all the blessings of the pattern; princely blessings. I am not here to think of others and judge them, but you may hear of others. It is a great mercy when the Lord helps young people leaving school, and those who are married. You hear of some, and people say; "Everything is wonderful!" This is excellent if it is of God, The Lord help you, guide you, give you wisdom and success. If the Lord has a favour to you, there is a word that is fulfilled; it may not be immediately, Presently; "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." I know this is not very palatable: it comes in various ways. Some of you are in a place

where you feel your life is blighted. "My joys are withered all and dead. Poor soul, you will not remain there for ever. Some bear the yoke in old age: they have the worst trials of life when they are old. With some they come in when they are young. "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him." You feel; "Everything seems to go well for others. With me it is the opposite." Let me tell you, if the Lord humbles you and enables you to fall into His hand, you have great blessings in store; sweet mercies because Christ is exalted. I was in a place and I kept walking in it, where my cup was bitter. I shall never forget solitary times going into the dear House of God in Shaftesbury Avenue. The Lord knew where I was. My friends, think of it! You will have a path of trial and sorrow, but you will prove there is such fulness of blessing. I felt in the gallery before I came out, I did not envy any in Greater London. I was so happy I did not know how to contain my joy. The thing is, if you walk with Him in His humiliation, and He has made you His friend because He is your Friend, you will be exalted. This is sweet to me because I feel I have contacted some heart. You will have joys unspeakable, blessings that eclipse your sorrow, and love to sweeten your cup. Amen.