

Sermon preached at Ebenezer, Clapham, by the Pastor, Mr. J. Delves,
on Wednesday evening, January 27th, 1954. Text John 21 verse 22

Hymns 649; 427; 730
Reading John 14.

"Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry
till I come, what is that to thee? follow
thou me."

We have assembled together again this evening, by the Lord's great mercy, to observe the sacred ordinance of believers' baptism. It is a joy that we are favoured with again, as we were recently, and wherein I believe we have seen an answer to our prayers. This can be said of both instances and in these, therefore, we have great reason to rejoice.

We find in the Scriptures that the Churches did rejoice when believers were blessed, moved and constrained to follow their Lord. When the Apostle Peter preached on the day of pentecost great numbers heard his word; Some were pricked in their hearts, brought under conviction of sin and made to cry for mercy, repented, found mercy and gladly received the apostle's preaching. It is said of them, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptised; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." It was a wonderful day! "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers."

But my point was this - there was a joy in those days; for we read that those believers praised God, going from house to house breaking bread, eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, "praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved."

When Philip preached the gospel in Samaria and numbers believed, the power of God attending his preaching, it is said, "There was great joy in that city." Of the Eunuch we read/^{that} after his baptism "he went on his way rejoicing." There is a joy that is felt in the heart when touched with the love of Christ and when the Lord's praying people are favoured to see one and another moved to walk in His ways. So it has been in this case. Answers to many prayers have brought in this instance a joy in seeing our dear friend and sister moved in her heart to desire to honour her Lord, Who has shown much mercy to her.

This is a very sacred ordinance and marks an important event in one's spiritual life, because it is the "putting on" of the Lord Jesus Christ openly in a public profession of His Name. It is very solemn but also very blessed. How wonderful it is that a poor unworthy sinner should be allowed and permitted to follow Him! How sweet when love constrains the heart, as has been in this case, and is the only right way of following! It is very blessed, too, when that love, of which we have read, bears its fruit in a gracious act of obedience, as the Lord Himself said when He was upon earth, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

We are disappointed by the absence of some who had greatly desired to be here this evening, but are prevented, one in particular, owing to the severity of the weather in other parts; but we desire that the Lord may sanctify this, and if we should be favoured with a view of Himself, that will be more than anything else can be! If it should be our mercy this evening, by faith

"To view the wounds of which He died,
And own our sins the cause,"

it would be very sacred; love would flow forth toward Him who has done so much for us. May we be helped and enabled, then, to seek that revelation of a suffering Saviour that flesh and blood can never give; as the Lord said to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." What a wonderful mercy to have any manifestation of the gospel in our souls! Poor lost sinners in themselves, deserving divine wrath, breakers of His holy righteous law - yet in whom He has revealed such distinguishing mercy.

This ordinance has a divine authority; otherwise it would not be in keeping for us to observe it. It would be foolishness if there were not a divine authority to keep this ordinance! We have the authority of the Lord Himself, Who was baptised in Jordan's river. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptised of him. But John forbad Him saying, I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him." The dear Redeemer of fallen guilty man was immersed beneath Jordan's flood. What a wonderful example! There have been many baptisms but none to compare with this holy act of obedience on the part of the dear Son of God!

According to the Scriptures, "Jesus, when He was baptised, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a Dove, and lighting upon Him; And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." What a remarkable occasion it was and what an example for His humble followers!

"The King Himself was seen
In Jordan's swelling flood;"
"And shall my pride disdain the deed
That's worthy of my God?"

We have also the example or the authority of command which came from the Lord Himself when speaking to His disciples after His resurrection. Before He left them to ascend up into heaven, He said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. 28 18 & 19) They were, then, as it is in Mark's gospel to go into all the world, among all nations, and all races of people, white and black. Is it not remarkable when we consider how the gospel has spread over the earth, north and south, east and west, in the far east and the far west? None of us can say how many have heard and received the gospel but we read of the Lord Jesus Christ that He gave "His life a ransom for many. If we, living on this little island, we in this little sanctuary this evening, are among the "many" for whom the Mediator gave

His life a ransom, what a wonderful mercy that will be! In the gospel according to Luke, it is thus recorded of the Lord before He left His disciples, "Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Luke 24. 45 to 47.

When I was looking at the records here in the gospels, it struck me with some sweetness that they were directed to go and teach all nations - to go into all the world - were not to confine themselves to the Jewish people - were not to be circumscribed to a certain area, but were to go under the leading of the Holy Spirit, by His direction, as pioneers of the everlasting gospel, "among all nations." So we have reason to believe that the Lord has His people, more or less, among all nations of the earth. What a wonderful mercy to be one of them! Go ye, therefore, upon My authority and teach all nations; that is, preach the gospel, make disciples of all nations.

It is also very sweet to notice what John speaks of in The Revelation - of that glorious company around the throne, whom he saw worshipping the Lamb, who were "out of every kindred, and tongue and people and nation." The Lord knows where His people are and He will search out His sheep and gather them into the fold of His grace. He will be their Shepherd, too, to bring them into the green pastures, by the still waters, to lead them in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.

Then there is also the authority of the practice of believers' baptism by the apostles. This, as I have mentioned, was in a very striking way on the day of pentecost, when great numbers followed the apostles' injunction, repenting of their sins, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and being thus brought to the obedience of faith, they "put Him on" in this act of believers' baptism, gladly receiving His Word. So with Peter, his Jewish prejudices were removed by the vision that he saw of a sheet let down from heaven which was knit at the four corners, full of all kinds of creeping things. This vision was to show him that the law of Moses and the rites thereof relating to the Jews were done away in Christ and that former distinctions were not now to be observed, to ^Prepare him to go on his journey (the men calling for him at the time) to Cornelius, a praying man.

When they came again to Cornelius he said to Peter, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." Then Peter said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; But in every nation" (there it comes in again) "he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him," - of any nation, whatever it may be. We do not know how many black people may be graciously taught of God, or any other colour either in Oriental countries or elsewhere; the Lord knows where they are, the Lord regards them, His eye is upon them.

So as we have recently noticed in the case of the Eunuch, he was baptised by Philip upon his confession of faith in reply to Philip, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So with others later in the 16th chapter - as in the case of Lydia "whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things spoken of Paul." Her heart was evidently moved by love to attend to them. So the jailor - a very different case in the circumstances of it - but moved by the same grace; the trembling jailor who just before had scourged the apostle cruelly now washes his stripes and is baptised. Here, then, is a threefold authority.

This ordinance has been continued with that of the Lord's Supper, a sacred, speaking ordinance, beautiful in its simplicity, of which the Lord Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of Me." The same truth applies to this ordinance of baptism; we do this in memory of Him Whom we hope has shown mercy to us, forgiven us our transgressions, washed our guilt away. Though we may not feel able to speak with such assurance, yet we can, and do say feelingly from our hearts,

"My hope is built on nothing less,
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

With respect to which I have read here, this ordinance is a following of the Lord Jesus Christ, a right following too, following Him through the watery grave.

The dear Redeemer experienced three baptisms. He experienced water baptism to which we have referred. He experienced the baptism of the Holy Ghost, according to the prophecy, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind upon the broken-hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." He was filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke 4 - 1. His ministers, as anointed, may have some

measure of this grace but He was filled with the Holy Ghost without measure. He was, so to speak, immersed, filled with the Holy Ghost. He also experienced the baptism of suffering - suffering the wrath of God, the curse of a broken law, the agony of Gethsamane, the conflict, the sweat, the groans, the blood. He experienced baptism there. He experienced it on the cross, where He was lifted up and where He poured out His soul unto death, vicariously in the place of his people for whom He became a ransom, according to Psalm 69 verses 1 and 2

In this text we have the Lord's reply to Peter, who appears to have been more concerned about John than he need have been and for which the Lord gently reproves him. "Peter, seeing John, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?" He was concerned about John, but Jesus said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me." Never mind about John. This may sometimes answer certain objections which one and another may feel with respect to this ordinance. Objections may rise up within as to one's own case; certain inward objections that may possibly be quite unwarranted - the Lord knows - and certain objections about others too. But the Lord brought Peter away from these uncalled-for queries about John to a consideration of himself, as though He would say, Never mind about John and what lies before him, how long he may live, what his future may bear; what is that to thee? That is not your concern; your concern, your matter is this, "Follow thou me." It is a mercy when the Lord brings us away with a gentle reproof from considering unduly the cases of others. We may have a gracious, prayerful interest in the circumstances of others, but that is not the point here. This, with respect to John, appears to have been an unwarranted curiosity. The Lord draws him to himself - Peter, you must leave John and what I am disposed to do concerning him, even if it is that I will that he tarry till I come. "Follow thou me."

I have read this for a text this evening because, as some of us have heard, the Lord, we believe, did gently and very feelingly speak this word into the heart of our friend and sister, who has now felt moved to follow Him. I believe there have been many objections in her heart, and there is only One who can rightly remove them and He is the Lord Himself! He can soon break them all down and bring the poor objector to His dear feet, touch the heart and give that desire to follow Him. It is very sweet to feel a holy compulsion, yet not rush into the matter, and it has been so with our dear

friend and sister. This step has been after many years of exercise, as some of us have observed, very much conflict, a gentle affectionate leading, yet often in the depths, so that sometimes there seemed a doubt as to whether we should ever see a deliverance in her case. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" He "brings the blind by a way that they knew not." He can soften a heart of stone, speak peace to a troubled heart, bring that holy quietness and joy which nothing else can bring but His sweet love, His tender love and that "still, small voice," the voice of the Shepherd, the Good Shepherd. What a joy this occasion is and has been to our dear friend; she has felt this happiness and was very graciously helped to speak before this Church of how the Lord has led her. It is a joy to us all and I believe we can say, some of particularly in this case,

"With pleasure we behold
Emmanuel's offspring come;
As sheep are gathered to the fold
And left no more to roam."

Here is this direction to the Lord's people and to those only who have this matter pressing upon their hearts, with an anxious concern, a fervent desire to know the Lord's will. This is His word, "Follow thou Me." It would be a mercy if this evening it were a voice from the Lord to others. "Follow thou Me."

What is this following? One point in following the Lord Jesus Christ is life! "You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;" Where there is no life in the soul this world has the first place, as with those Ephesians of whom we read "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." No one will follow after Christ graciously by the leading and teaching of the Holy Spirit unless there is life in the soul, and it is that life which He implants, it is His own life - "Christ in you the Hope of Glory." It is very blessed to have a religion like this, very humbling, very sacred. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." I am come for this end. This is the Holy Spirit's work then, to quicken into divine life. "Ye must be born again," said the Lord to Nicodemus.

Another point in this following is faith. We cannot follow Him

acceptably unless we have faith in Him, unless we believe in Him. What importance is placed in this believing! "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth in him." John 3 v 36. Sometimes we feel to have very little faith - it seems so weak - and yet it is there!

"Faith in the bleeding Lamb
O what a gift is this!"

It is a wonderful grace. By faith His people follow Him in a path of tribulation, looking alone to Him. "We walk by faith, not by sight." This ordinance is an ordinance of faith in this aspect - being an open profession of faith in the Lamb of God.

In this following there is also sacrifice, as the Lord Himself has said, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14 v 33. This means we must not lean on or trust in anything in ourselves or any arm of flesh, or place our hope of eternal life in any attainment of our own but lean wholly and entirely upon Him, forsaking all beside. Sometimes this means much affliction and trouble, even from those in kindred ties but where this following is put in the heart, the Lord will be first, His honour must be first - and it is first when this sacrifice is made, when a believer by His grace is willing and enabled to "present his body a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is his reasonable service." "Follow thou me."

Submission is in this following too, submission to His command, teaching, doctrine, Himself. Where there is a real following of the Lord Jesus, there is also a falling into His hands and sometimes it can be sweetly felt as when one is enabled to say, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."

Love is in this following - with respect to this ordinance particularly. It cannot be a right following unless it is in love to Him. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him." John 14 v 21. There may be love in some exercised hearts here, some burdened hearts, upon whom even

this matter of following may press as a heavy burden but who have not, as yet, felt able to venture; there may be love there but what is needed in these cases is for the Lord to shed it abroad, increase it, to thus constrain, openly to show the fruit and effect of it. This following is an evidence of His love when it is rightly observed and walked in. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

Obedience is in this following. It is not a hard, dry, legal obedience.

"His yoke is soft and mild

For love is all He asks."

"Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; For I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." It can be a sweet following; (it is not an excitement, not a matter of carnal curiosity) it is a joy to faith.

It has been a joy to many that our dear friend and sister has felt enabled to bear a good witness, a good testimony of what the Lord has done for her. We are favoured again, as we have been with others. How we need to be humbled, kept at His feet, softened by His mercy!

Why do His dear people follow Him? Because of what He has done for them - that is why! "The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." They follow Him for the love they bear toward His Name and because of the way He has gone before them as their great Example.

With respect to walking in this ordinance then, the great desire in the heart of our friend and sister, the one desire has been and is to honour Him, to speak of His loving-kindness as was mentioned, and to honour Him for His Name's sake - that is it - ? for His Name's sake." All honour to Him Who shed His precious blood to ransom guilty man - and some here have reason to hope and believe it was for them. All honour to Him then and now by His help and grace, we desire to observe this ordinance for His Name's sake. May He lead us in the green pastures, may our souls be refreshed by His mercy and warmed by His love, as it were, in some feeling that He should have gone into such depths of suffering

for such poor nothings as we are. Bless His Holy Name now and for evermore. Amen.

Address at the Pool.

Dear Friends - It is our privilege once again to lead a sister through this ordinance of believers' baptism. I believe that we can feelingly say that we do so in a desire to honour the Lord. I know that is in her heart. She was enabled recently to bear a good testimony before this Church of the Lord's loving-kindness and mercy to her soul, through a period of seven years, more or less, in which she described herself as a bruised reed - not a bruised reed that the Lord had broken, but a bruised reed whom He has kindly and mercifully healed, strengthened and blessed. In expressing her desire to come forward, she said to me, "If I can go in His strength to speak well of Him, I feel I would love to go." It was this word she mentioned, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only." The Lord has dealt very tenderly and graciously with her, as I have said, and has brought her through many depths. What a wonderful mercy, what an answer to prayer! Many members and friends have felt and expressed by their encouraging letters a union of heart towards her. We rejoice in this and pray that the Lord may bless her in this act of obedience and grant her a very sweet sense of His presence so that going down into the water she may see Him and lose sight of all beside.

Prayer.

O gracious and ever glorious God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, we are, by Thy mercy, brought now to this Pool and have to thank Thee for one who has thus been constrained. We thank Thee for this mercy. Thou hast spoken the Word and spoken it in mercy to her heart. Do grant her Thy blessing in this and help her through, so that she may have reason to sing of the loving-kindness of the Lord. May others also be blessed, for indeed we have to say, "And yet there is room." O Thou blessed Spirit of God, we pray that Thou wilt come and bring many out of their prisons, to praise Thy name and to go forth in the footsteps of the flock. O do grant us still further tokens of Thy mercy in this. We pray that the chariot may have to stand still again yet. Do come down to us even in this little place like rain upon the mown grass :

as showers that water the earth.. Now help us through, pardon every sin and touch our hearts with Thy sweet love and mercy. We ask it for Thy Name's sake. Amen.

My dear sister - Upon your confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I now baptize thee in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Doxology.

O Lord we desire to thank Thee for Thy goodness. Do bless our dear sister in this her obedience and do bless the Church in it. Grant that we may have many more yet if Thy holy will. Now forgive every sin and may the love of God the Father, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the communion of God the Holy Ghost abide with us now and evermore. Amen.
