

No. 3

Preached on Lord's Day morning, 12th January, 1964.

Text: "I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord".—Psalm cxviii. 17.

SOME of you will remember that we ventured to speak very recently on a Wednesday evening from this text, and to me it seemed like a preparation for last Lord's Day and the subject then. The matter is still with me. There is still more to be declared, but I am very concerned lest we should be taken up with the external details more than with the works of the Lord. It is a solemn concern of mine, as I look back on last Lord's Day; you heard quite a lot in the way of words, but the main thing is "the works of the Lord." Could you trace out in what you heard "the works of the Lord"?—the main thing, the only thing that matters. All other works are vain, all other words are vain but the works and words of the Lord.

Last Lord's Day morning we tried to tell you, dear friends, a little of the call by grace of this poor sinner and also a little of his experience relative to the ministry. In the evening we tried to set forth how God called us to the ministry of the everlasting Gospel, covering a period of something like twenty years of tossings to and fro, risings up and goings down, and there is just a little more I would like to add to this regarding my experience.

Over a period of a few years I went down into three deep and dark valleys. In the first valley I made a vow, that vow was this: "Lord, if Thou wilt spare my life, if Thou wilt appear and deliver me and send me forth, equip me, qualify me for the ministry, I will go." Now, in due time, the Lord brought me up out of that horrible pit and miry clay, and yet there was no fulfilling of the vow, although it was not forgotten. This shows how there is an appointed time and there cannot be any going forward until the Lord makes His will manifest, and then there cannot be one moment's delay. After a time the Lord brought me down again in body and mind—deep soul darkness and distress, also physical disability. My mind went back immediately to the former occasion. This

trial was deeper, darker, and more prolonged. Well, I recalled my vow; I said this, and I meant it: "Lord, I will really go if Thou wilt appear for me and spare my life and bring me up out of this horrible pit". A pit is a deep, dark place where there is no water, nothing grows, and there is no light. Now the Lord heard my prayer; "He sent from above; He took me, He delivered me: He drew me out of many waters" of affliction (Ps. xviii. 16), when the billows and waves had passed over me. What about the vow? Again there was no fulfilling of it.

It was not forgotten. When I came into further darkness after this, and when I read the Word, I found there was condemnation and two words in particular condemned me. The first was this: "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed" (Eccles. v. 4). I turned elsewhere in the Word, and something else troubled me. It was in one of the parables in Luke—chapter 12, verse 47: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes". Now I greatly feared those stripes and I feared they might come upon me, as I deserved them richly. To add to this, one came to me and said, "I have just heard Mr. — preach" (and to the best of my knowledge he did not know what I was in) "and he said, The Lord might give us a command and there might be a delay and lack of conformity to it, disobedience. The Lord might repeat that command a second time, as He did to Jonah, and if there is no obedience this time, it may mean walking in a path of great sorrow and darkness the rest of your days." Well, that did try me.

I told you last Lord's Day, I believe, about the third valley; the deepest and darkest of all. You will remember the word I had early in 1960: "This year thou shalt die" (Jer. xxviii. 16) and how I did nearly die in June of that year. Now the Lord brought me up, spared my life, and I had the word, "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years" (Is. xxxviii. 5), and you know I said to Him, "if it is

five days I have to live, they shall be Thine". It is remarkable to me that He has spared me to see 1964.

Now there is this one other thing I want to tell you because I feel it is a blessed experience, although a personal one. A few years ago I set out from home on my cycle to go the three miles to The Dicker, and then by car to Lewes, where I worked. The weather looked very unsettled when I set out and then, after the first mile or so, it began to get very dark and the rain came. I heard it thunder in the distance and I said to myself, "You have made a mistake, sinner; you must turn round and go back." Something said, "No, go on, go forward; don't turn back". When I came to the main A.22 Road, which is very bleak and open, such a storm broke over my head; the rain began to seep through my clothes and I could hardly see for the rain; there was lightning on all sides, but my heart was so full of the love of Christ that I was singing His praises. I felt to be very near the Lord Jesus Christ. He was in my heart and I said to Him that if the next flash of lightning strikes me, it won't matter if I die in the gutter, I believe I shall be with Thee. I felt that. It was very sweet and sacred. I reached my destination, the house of my friends near The Dicker. What a welcome they gave me! They took me in and gave me a change of clothing and I thought, this is just like a pilgrim's path:

"They leave the world's deceitful shore
And leave it to return no more." (290)

They may be tempted to go back, but faith says, "Go on, go on"—"fear thou not, for I am with thee" (Is. xliii. 5), and He was with me on that journey. All that I wanted was made ready to hand when I reached my desired haven. What a welcome! What a welcome for sinners that are weary! What a welcome—home and friends, change of raiment—"Fruits new and old laid up in store where they shall feast and want no more". A royal board spread for them at the marriage supper of the Lamb. I went over the same strip of road the next day in better weather, but there was not that same sweetness. The sweet memory of it remained, but now there was not the storm, so there was not the peace.

Well now, we will come to what brought me here ; what brought us together. When I set out in the ministry in July, 1960, I received a letter from West Street asking if I could give a few dates for the next year, with a post script, "Did I happen to be free on the first Lord's Day in August, 1960?" Well, I was free and I came that Lord's Day. Some of you may remember that I came here that day with the text in Romans xv. 13—"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing". When I left the pulpit in the morning I felt so ashamed and thought what a re-shaping of things was needed for the evening service. Whether it was so or not, I know not, but I ventured on the same text. We had the Ordinance in the evening and it was my first experience of administering that, but the Lord helped me.

In 1961, the Lord laid aside two of His dear servants, and He took one of them home. That meant there were some vacant dates here and I came early in that year on certain Wednesdays. There was something going on in the hearts of the friends here, although I had no intimation of it, but a letter reached me in April of that year—a carefully-worded letter—which contained a sentence like this: "Did I feel anything special to the Cause and friends here, such as would encourage them to hope that, in the Lord's hand, it might lead to a closer union?" After a few days I acknowledged the letter and said when I felt able I would try to reply.

I am going back for a moment to March of that year. I was engaged here on the first Sabbath Day that month. I was unwell when I left home about 7.15 to cycle to Polegate Station, leaving my cycle at a friend's house. The friends here in Croydon with whom I stayed that day were concerned about me and between them they decided to drive me home that night in their car—a distance of about 90 miles all told. They made me comfortable in the back of their car and I spoke of their kindness, when one of them said, "Well,

'Love all defects supplies,
'Makes great obstructions small.'" (792)

I was unwell in bed for a few days. My dear Pastor came to see me and questioned me rather suspiciously about

West Street—"How did I feel there?" and then said, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." I noted it and kept it in my heart, although I felt my insufficiency, ignorance and weakness. I am only a learner, a beginner as it were, and not likely to be anything else.

I was helped to reply later to the aforementioned letter, and said, "Yes, I did feel a love to you here, especially to the Deacons in prayer in the vestry before each service." I did feel a love to them. May it increase and abound! I had to confess that when I went to other Causes I often found myself drawn to you here, praying that the Lord would bless you in His House. But as regards the second point in their letter (i.e., regarding a closer union) I said, "I must leave that entirely between you and the Lord."

I subsequently received the Church's invitation to preach here for the first three months in 1962 with a view to the Pastorate, and now there commenced a battle. I was in a dark condition and did not know what to do, but going to work one day those words, which my Pastor spoke to me came back to me: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife." Had I to leave my spiritual father and my Mother Church at The Dicker and be joined unto this Cause at West Street and be made one flesh? Then one Friday morning, as I went to the Office, another word dropped powerfully into my heart: "Thy tacklings are loosed" (Is. xxxiii. 23). I felt the Lord was coming, and sometimes the Lord's people have a special sense and feeling that the Lord is on the way to bless them. I felt the Lord was on the way to bless me, and I felt the loosening of my bonds. Now just think of a ship and all its rigging. There might be a loosening, as in Paul's day; they cast out the tackling of the ship to lighten it. Loosening is not a complete deliverance. You loosen the ropes of a tent before you take it down, but it is a preparation for it. "Thy tacklings are loosed." I kept that in my heart, praying that the Lord would make His will known to me and speak further in the matter. And He did that the same day when I was on my way home. He dropped in

this word: "Whose heart the Lord opened" (Acts xvi 14). Here was the complete opening—first the loosening, now the opening. I kept that in my heart. The next day I travelled to Old Hill, Staffs., to preach there and that had to be my text, i.e., "Whose heart the Lord opened". And the Lord did help me. After that I prayed for another token and I had to wait until Tuesday evening. I went to the Lord's House; it was a Prayer Meeting and I found that a dear colleague in the ministry was taking the address. Immediately he started the reading I knew that I had got my token. He commenced his reading from Deuteronomy xxx. 11: "For this commandment which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it". Well, now I felt I could do it, and I wrote straightaway to the friends, saying that I would serve them in the following year for three months, with a view to the Pastorate, if the Lord will.

I will pass by the following months and come to 1962, when I came her for three months. You may remember the text on the first Lord's Day in January—"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Exodus xxxiii. 14). Little did any of us know that on the following Lord's Day I should undergo an operation in hospital. I felt that His presence did go with me and that I was in His hands. Now a number of people felt it was a mark against us. Some said so plainly and not altogether in a kindly way. We did not feel that to be the case at all, but rather that it would be for the furtherance of the Gospel. And that affliction bound us closer together; it did not drive us apart. There was an absence of two or three weeks, but there was a knitting and uniting during that period of three months.

Half-way through that period I had two distinct feelings—the weight and awful responsibility and solemnity of

the matter, and yet I felt disappointed that the three months was coming to an end. I saw something that I had never seen before—in fact I could not have seen it before—I saw a continuity in the ministry. On the first Lord's Day in April, at the end of the three months, my text was "Watch and pray" (Matt. xxvi. 41). I tried to exhort you not to lay hands suddenly on any man, but to watch, particularly the ministry, from then on, and to be much in prayer. Soon after I received a letter with the resolution of the Church extending to me their invitation to become their Pastor.

Again I was plunged into the depths and knew not what to do. I spread the letter before the Lord and asked Him to make His will plain to me. My prayer was "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts ix. 6). I was due to come back here for three consecutive services in May, and I felt this: when I come back in May, I am sure the Lord will give me the answer to this pressing enquiry. I believe some of you thought so too. I came back with that text, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—seeking to know His will, but it was not granted here at all, and that was a trial. I did not know what to do. I went to various Causes in the meantime and one Lord's Day in June I was engaged at Broad Oak, Heathfield. I had to go with that text again, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and there I seemed to have much more liberty than I did at West Street. As I was preaching in the morning, the Lord loosened my bonds and I felt entirely different at the end of that morning service. As I left the friends there that day, one said something to me, namely: "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it" (Is. xxx. 21). I went home quite a different man from what I was when I went to the House of God in the morning. I felt the Lord had come, was coming, and would still come, and I prayed earnestly for further tokens.

The next evening one of our little girls was singing hymns in bed and I listened at the door as she sang; and she was singing this hymn:

"High beyond imagination
Is the love of God to man." (582)

The last verse in our book concludes, "All is settled and my soul approves it well", but in the Sabbath School hymn book, from which she was singing, it runs, "All is settled and the Church approves it well". I thanked the Lord for that and still prayed for more. On Tuesday I went to the Prayer Meeting and the Lord's servant spoke from this: "He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth" (Rev. iii. 7). He said, "If the Lord has opened a door for you, no man can shut it, not even you". I noted that. Then for some time I had had that line of the hymn on my mind:

"Confirmed by one soft, secret word,
I seek no farther light;
But walk, depending on my Lord,
By faith, and not by sight." (812)

and on the Wednesday morning, two or three letters came by post, and in one of them a friend had written that same verse, and I felt that to be a confirming word from the Lord. Yet still I prayed for a further token, and also felt, "Be not angry with me".

On the Thursday morning, I went across the room to tear off the calendar for the previous day, as was my usual custom, and before I did so I felt that if there is anything about "going" I shall surely have to go. I tore it off very tremblingly. It was unusual, but that day there were two texts and the second was this, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God" (Ps. lxxi. 16). I still prayed for one more token and that was granted the following day. This was one which some might call a rather unusual token. I was returning from Lewes and arrived at The Dicker where I kept my car in the drive of a friend's house near the chapel. I found on reaching there that the dear little boy and his father had contrived a plan between them; they had erected a great board and stood it against my little Austin Seven and had written "No Waiting". I thought, "Ah—no, no waiting. No, I cannot wait. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes" (Ps. cxviii. 23). Now I felt as free as could be in the

matter and I went home and telephoned the Deacon and said that I would come, if the Lord's will, and I followed it up with a letter of confirmation.

That completes it, dear friends, yet I have no doubt I have left something out, but may He now grant us grace to fall into His hands and to look for the works of the Lord from now on—those works that will redound to His praise and honour and glory. Amen.

No. 4