

(i) Scripture

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God ...

I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

2 Corinthians 8. 1-9 (*New King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

The liberality of the Macedonian churches (2 Cor. 8. 3).

'Paul highlighted three elements of the Macedonians' giving which summed up the concept of freewill giving:

(1) "according to their ability". Giving is *proportionate*. God sets no fixed amount or percentage and expects His people to give based on what they have (Luke 6. 38; 1 Cor. 16. 2);

(2) "beyond their ability". Giving is *sacrificial*. God's people are to give according to what they have; yet, it must be in proportions that are sacrificial (cf. Mark 12. 41–44); and

(3) "freely willing"—lit. "one who chooses his own course of action". Giving is *voluntary*. God's people are not to give out of compulsion, manipulation, or intimidation'.

(*The MacArthur Study Bible (NKJV)*, on 2 Cor. 8. 3.)

'Willingly'

'Apart from the willingness embodied in His people, God would not do anything, particularly related to His corporate testimony with (i) the tabernacle under Moses, (ii) the temple under David and Solomon, and (iii) the recovered temple under Ezra and Nehemiah.

'In the three sections of the Old Testament describing (i) *the tabernacle* [*'willingly with his heart'*, Exod. 25. 2], (ii) *the temple* [*'offered willingly'*, 1 Chron. 29. 6, 9], and (iii) *the recovered temple* [*'who offer willingly'*, Ezra 7. 16], one common thing is mentioned—*the willingness of the people* in serving the Lord to build His corporate testimony'.

(B. Freeman, *'The Supplied Life'*, Meditation for 17 October.)

Come and

(i) Come and *'see'* (Psa. 66. 5; John 1. 39).

(ii) Come and *'hear'* (Psa. 66. 16).

(iii) Come and *'buy'* (Isa. 55. 1).

(iv) Come and *'rest'* (Matt. 11. 28).

(v) Come and *'drink'* (John 7. 37; cf. Rev. 22. 17).

(vi) Come and *'dine'* (John 21. 12).

Two quotations about our Lord's Transfiguration (Mark 9. 2-13)

1. 'If the appearance of Elijah and Moses was not sufficient to demonstrate Jesus' authority, now a voice from the clouds, the same voice that spoke at Jesus' baptism, publicly confirms beyond all doubt the identity of Jesus: "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him" (Mark 9. 7). These words bring the scene to its climax and at the same time create its profound irony.

'The final command of the voice from the clouds, "Hear Him", forces the audience to reassess the apparent point of the episode.

'From its outset, the transfiguration has emphasized what is seen: the glow and colour of Jesus' clothing Mark (9. 3), the appearance of Elijah with Moses (Mark 9. 4), even the three booths Peter wished to build and the over-shadowing cloud (Mark 9. 5, 7).

'Surely all of these "sights" must be what Jesus meant about "seeing" (Mark 9. 1) the kingdom of God come in power ... But in a passage where Jesus speaks not at all, where the emphasis is overwhelmingly on vision, the voice from the cloud incongruously commands, not "Behold Him", or "See Him", or "Look upon Him", but "Hear Him".

'The glorious vision of a transformed Jesus with Elijah and Moses that so impresses Peter is undercut by the words from heaven. What Jesus has been saying to Peter, the disciples, and the multitude, and what He will reiterate in the coming chapters is the way of suffering, the cross, and death, which He and any who would follow him must walk in this world.

'The glorious vision may be what Peter and many others want to see, but it is the message of suffering that all must hear.

(M. A. Tolbert, 'Sowing the Gospel', page 206.)

2. 'Comparing the Transfiguration with Jesus' crucifixion ... the two events show how glory and death intertwine, and one sees Jesus "humiliated and exalted, surrounded by saints and ringed by sinners, clothed with light and yet wrapped in a garment of darkness" [quoted from Dale C. Allison Jr. and W. D. Davies, 'The Gospel of Saint Matthew (International Critical Commentary', Volume 2, page 706] ...

'Note the parallels and contrasts:

(i) The glory revealed on the mountain is a private epiphany while the suffering on the cross is a public spectacle.

(ii) Jesus is surrounded on the mountain by two prophets of old, Moses and Elijah; on Golgotha, by two thieves.

(iii) On the mountain, Jesus' garments glisten in His glory; on Golgotha, they take His garments from Him, compounding His humiliation.

(iv) Three male disciples view His glory at close range; three female disciples view His suffering from afar (Mark 15. 40).

(v) A divine voice from the cloud announces that Jesus is the Son of God; one of His executioners, a Roman centurion, acclaims Him to be the Son of God after His death (Mark 15. 39).

(vi) In both scenes someone raises the question of Elijah. Coming down the mountain, Jesus informs His disciples that Elijah has already come and they did to him as they pleased. When Jesus hangs from the cross in torment, the bystanders taunt Him with one last jibe: "Let's see if Elijah comes to take Him down" (Mark 15. 36).

(D. E. Garland, 'Mark (The NIV Application Commentary)', on Mark 9. 2-13.)

'Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (the cross)', (Col. 2. 15).

'They think they have reached the hour of victory; they have got this One whom they hate and the devil was delighted. If only he could kill him, that would be the end.

'That was his terrible miscalculation. He did not realize, and this is the devil's great blunder, that by bringing the Son of God to the cross he was defeating himself, and bringing about his own ultimate doom.

'How? Well, the Apostle tells us that our Lord there on the cross, in apparent weakness, was putting the devil and his powers to an open shame and that he was triumphing over them'.

(Martyn Lloyd-Jones, 'The Cross: God's Way of Salvation', Chapter 5.)

'God ... will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but ... will provide the way of escape' (1 Cor. 10.13).

Ponder the thought-provoking words of Ben Witherington III: 'The Devil cannot make you an offer you can't refuse'.

(Ben Witherington III, 'How Not to Interpret the Bible', Part Nine.)

'As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death' (1 Cor. 11. 26)

'Every time we eat the bread we are remembering the body of Christ nailed to the cross for us, and every time we drink the wine we are remembering the blood that was shed on the cross as a covering for our sins.

'A little girl, seeing a cross on the communion table, asked, "Mama, what is that "plus sign" doing on the table?" The cross is God's great "plus sign" of history'.

(Billy Graham, 'Unto the Hills', Meditation for 15 October.)

'Having an great priest over the house of God; let us draw near' (Heb. 10. 21-22).

'At no time does the writer (to the Hebrews) actually give the title "priests" to believers, reserving the title throughout for the Lord Himself. Yet he clearly does view Christians as priests (see Heb. 13. 10, 15-16).

'Under the Old Covenant, the stranger that "drew near" to God's symbolic presence was to be put to death (Num. 18. 7). Even Uzziah, the king of Judah, was visited in severe judgement when he intruded into the province of the priesthood and entered into the sanctuary to offer incense (2 Chron. 26. 16-21).

'How privileged we are, that, though once "Gentiles in the flesh" (Eph. 2. 11), we can now, as Christian priests, "draw near" into God's real and immediate presence'.

(Day by Day in Prayer (Precious Seed Publications), page 357.)

Ten 'Be not's in the New Testament letters.

- (i) 'Be not highminded' (Rom. 11. 20; 1 Tim. 6. 17).
- (ii) 'Be not conformed to this world' (Rom. 12. 2).
- (iii) 'Be not overcome of evil' (Rom. 12. 21).
- (iv) 'Be not children in understanding' (1 Cor. 14. 20).
- (v) 'Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage' (Gal. 5. 1).
- (vi) 'Be not drunk with wine' (Eph. 5. 18).
- (vii) 'Be not weary in well doing' (2 Thess. 3. 13).
- (viii) 'Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord' (2 Tim. 1. 8).
- (ix) 'Be not slothful' (Heb. 6. 12).
- (x) 'Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines' (Heb. 13. 9).

'Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 6. 11).

'We do rejoice that the old man was crucified with Him. We would daily mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts. We wish to be to the world, to sin, to selfishness as dead and buried men; as dead men, out of mind, so would we be.

'Oh, that no faculty might hear the voice of the charmer when it charms us towards sin!

'May we be delivered from the power to obey the lusts of the flesh and the temptations of the devil. May grace so sanctify us that we may reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord'.

(C. H. Spurgeon, 'Sitting Over Against the Sepulchre', A Collection of the Sunday Morning Prayers, Chapter 6.)

'A stiff-necked people'.

'God, after first threatening to consume (the people), by coming up into the midst of them in a moment, had said, "I will not go up in the midst of thee, for thou art a stiff-necked people" (Exod. 33. 3)

'Yet Moses says, "If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go up amongst us, for it is a stiff-necked people" (Exod. 34. 9).

'Grace had come in in the interval, God's goodness had passed before him. This changed all, and the people being so stiff-necked, Moses says, we cannot do without God. So that Moses, when once the foundation of grace is laid, makes the very condition of the people, which would have led God to consume them, or at least not go amongst them, the reason for God's going up amongst them'.

(J. N. Darby, 'Romans 9', Collected Writings, Volume 33, pages 397-398.)

'Solomon ... even him did foreign women cause to sin' (Neh. 13. 26).

'Solomon married into the Moabites and Ammonites to the east, the Edomites and Egyptians to the south, and the Sidonians and Hittites to the north (1 Kings 11. 1).

'All of Solomon's wives, except his Egyptian princess, belonged to Canaanite peoples whom Israelites were not to marry lest they be led into apostasy (1 Kings 11. 2; cf. Exod. 34. 16; Deut. 7. 1-4) ...

'As the king's affection for his harem increased, his passion for God diminished ... the Hebrew verb rendered 'love' ... is used to describe Solomon's love for the Lord (1 Kings 3. 3), then ... is used to describe Solomon's love for his foreign wives (1 Kings 11. 1) ...

'What God said to the king ('rent the kingdom from you ... give it to ...', 1 Kings 11. 11) matched ... Samuel's statement to Saul when his disobedience lost the monarchy for his heirs ('rent the kingdom

from you ... given it to', 1 Sam 15. 28) ... Samuel told Saul that the kingdom would pass to his superior; in contrast, the Lord told Solomon that the kingdom would pass to his servant.

(Dan Lioy, 'From Zenith to Zero', Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary, pages 79 and 81.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Two fainting men.

1. The 100-year-old building which had served as a lecture theatre for the local college was about to be demolished. Several students and staff stood watching as the wrecker's ball began to do its destructive work. It was just starting to rain when one of the students noticed that his Mathematics Professor had suddenly fainted.

The Professor quickly came around and the student helped him to his feet.

'This must be very difficult for you to watch, sir', the student said. 'With all the tradition associated with the building and the memories of the many students you have taught there, I can't imagine how hard this must be for you'.

'Oh, it's not that', the Professor replied. 'When it started to rain, I realised that *I had left my umbrella in there*'.

2. Henry had only just left through his front door when he suddenly collapsed on the pathway outside his house. From within, his wife, Veronica, heard him fall and rushed out.

Seeing Henry lying there, immediately she phoned the emergency health line to call for medical help.

When the paramedics arrived, Henry soon regained consciousness. One of the men asked Henry if he had any idea what had caused him to faint.

'I can tell you', Henry replied, 'what I saw was enough to make anybody pass out.

'Shortly before I fainted, our son, David, had asked me for the keys to the garage. When he came out, instead of driving my car, *he was pushing the lawn mower!*'