

Gospel Addresses

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon emphasizes the believer's assurance in Christ's work, the hope of eternal glory, and the call to live in light of God's grace and judgment.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:1

Topics: "Assurance of Salvation", "Reconciliation"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound comfort found in the knowledge of being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, highlighting the believer's confidence in eternal life and the glory that awaits them. He explains that while death and judgment are realities, believers can face them with assurance, knowing they are 'absent from the body and present with the Lord.' Darby also stresses the importance of understanding our completeness in Christ, which liberates us from the burdens of sin and judgment, and encourages believers to live in the light of this truth. He calls for a recognition of God's unchanging grace and the necessity of walking in the consciousness of our relationship with Him. Ultimately, the sermon invites listeners to embrace their identity in Christ and the eternal hope that comes with it.

Transcript

The attention of our readers is earnestly invited to the various papers appearing under this title, adapted as they are to meet, in a simple but thorough and precious way, the first needs of the soul. They consist, in many cases, of notes taken at the time of the utterances of honoured and devoted servants of the Lord.

{Words of Grace for the Household of Faith, Vol. 2 1899, pages 48-51.}

No. 1. 2 Corinthians 5. December 22nd, 1870.

There are two words of immense comfort here, when once we have believed in the Lord Jesus and His work, and yet often they are a trial to people who cannot say them with simplicity. They are "we know" and "we have." (v. 1.) There is no question as to whether we can be received or not, for we are reconciled. The consequence of having eternal life is that we "live to Him." We know this, and it gives us a consciousness of the place we are in. It was not merely the apostle that had it, it was common Christian knowledge. The apostle considers here what its bearings are as to the Christian, and then to the world. The latter are death and judgment.

First I get the fulness of my place, that all this glory is mine; then he contemplates judgment. He says, "I don't want to be unclothed [to die]; I am looking for mortality to be 'swallowed up of life.'" Such a power has come in in the Son of God, that if the moment for this were come I should not die at all; it is divine power. "Enoch was not, for God took him." Such a power neutralizes death, and if you are "naked" - that is, you haven't got Christ - you will be raised for judgment.

Do you believe that God has given you glory? (v. 2.) You may groan now because you have not got it yet.

It is not a question of what we deserve; He has wrought us for it (v. 5), and He knows what He has wrought. He is glorifying Himself by us according to the riches of His grace, and He does what will glorify Himself. If we believe that He gave His Son for us, all the rest is easy; and that the blessed Lord gave Himself for us, then nothing is too great to expect.

Do you say, I fail here, and come short there: what will God do? The Holy Ghost never reasons like this, that is my responsibility, and drawing from it as a consequence what God will do. The Holy Ghost draws the consequence from what God has done for us: "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by His life." He draws His conclusions from what God has done, and not from what we have done. The consequences of what we have done are judgment, and all would be over with me.

God never gives me up. It is His joy to get sinners to depend on what He has done for them, His joy to find the lost piece of silver, to get the lost sheep back. He does not ask us what He shall give us, He brings forth the best robe. He has wrought us for the glory. How can it be? Nothing less than by the gift of the Son of God on the cross. And He gives us the earnest of His Spirit that we may know it now.

Then the apostle looks the natural portion of man in the face. There is death and judgment, but he begins by saying, "We are always confident." I am looking for glory, but still I look death in the face. What is death for the believer? "Absent from the body, and present with the Lord." We were under death, and subject to it, and the judgment afterwards; now, instead of my belonging to it, death belongs to me. "All things are yours; life, death, things present, things to come, ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." When I die, I have done with mortality; my body goes to corruption; no matter, it will be raised again. I have done with this burden, the spirit is with Christ; and I have done with pain, sorrow, temptation, with having to resist evil, and bear with it. I am with Christ, in perfect happiness with Him, though not yet in glory. I am looking for glory, but if I do die I go and enjoy Christ, I depart "to be with Christ," "absent from the body." In this "vain show" in which we walk, "disquieting ourselves in vain," it is what faith gets at that is true. How little those men, when they brake the legs of the thief, thought that they were sending him off to paradise! "To die is gain," and all I am anxious about, the apostle says, is that when He comes He should find me what He likes, that all I do may be acceptable unto Christ. That was the sanctifying effect on Paul.

"We must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ," and it is useful to think of it. The apostle does not hide what a solemn thing it is, but the effect is that he persuades men - it does not alarm him. He has not such a thought. God had wrought him for the glory. It is a blessed thing to see all the wondrous ways and dealings of God in grace with us. There are poor things, not ready, still in their sins; Paul feels what a solemn thing judgment is, and the love of Christ constrains him when he thinks of their meeting the judgment of God. But we are made manifest to God, that is the sanctifying power, as a present thing: he looks at everything as it would appear at the day of judgment - of the believer I mean. By realizing this he is able to look at things and judge them as they would be there. "He that hath this hope in Him purifieth

himself, even as He is pure." I must take Christ as my pattern and measure. I am manifested now, everything I do and think is clear out before God now. Then I shall find a Person judging who has put away all my sins, and there can be no question of imputing them to me.

There are three things. First, the bright and glorious hope for which He has wrought us. Then, secondly, he takes up death, and says, "We are always confident." We have a life that death does not touch at all. Thirdly, if he looks at judgment, it only urges him to go and preach to other people.

You will find many a thing that is not made manifest as in the day, if you are going on with your own will, and your own thoughts, and not according to God. It will not be manifest even if you do love Him, but that won't do.

Verse 14 shows that all were dead, not merely guilty. What man left for five hours would think of the things of God and of Christ unless God had awakened him? That is more than being guilty. Then he says: if we are beside ourselves it is to God; for then his mind was wrapt in ecstasy; if he began to reflect, it was thinking of other people. He just adds it is all new, the whole thing.

If the greatest sinner in London were here, God is beseeching him to be reconciled; and how terrible if he should have to say in that day: Thou wast beseeching me, and I didn't care about it. If I cling to selfishness, I can't be bright. If I am grieving the Spirit, I am uncomfortable, not because I have not got eternal life, but because I have got it and am not living up to it.

No. 2. Matthew 17:22 to end. March 7th, 1871.

{Words of Grace for the Household of Faith, Vol. 2 1899, pages 75-6.}

In the first three gospels the Lord is presented to the Jews, and they reject Him. In John He is rejected from the first. But He says, "I will have My sheep." Nothing can touch His grace; if man cannot understand the grace in which He came, He goes on with it still. He is always the same. No matter what failure or rejection or stupidity He meets, He is the same.

What poor failing creatures we are. He may have to chasten us and deal with us: it only shows His watchful grace! We can lean on a heart that never changes in grace, and never can change in power. In ups and downs, rejections and receptions, He never changes. The thread runs all through of what He was - God revealed in man: perfect, constant grace.

Then comes His death, without which we could have no part in the blessing. In dying He has taken a new place, founded on redemption; and now I find, not only that He is unchanged, but He has wrought a work the value of which is unchanged, and which is the ground of eternal blessedness.

Redemption remains unchanged, and whatever is built on that has an eternal character. He associates us completely with Himself in the effect of that. When He spoke of His death His disciples were "exceeding sorry." We know it as the foundation truth of salvation, but we don't like the cross a bit better for ourselves than they did. He shows them their association with Himself, and says, "Then are the children free." They were children of the King, Peter as much as Himself. He is Jehovah, and knows and can do all things; and now, this truth of death having come in, He can put them into His place. He brings them all through into the same place with Himself. His heart brings us there; and the thing for us is to walk in the consciousness of it, to walk in the sense that that is what is in Christ's heart. He shows us His love by manifesting it down here, but He takes us up too. If I am to walk in the Father's love, I know Christ is in it. Being in this place, I

taste the perfect love of Christ to Him in it. I confide and trust in His love, with heart-confidence in the love of Christ which does pass knowledge, but which we know and confide in. I obey and adore Him, but I see the way He has brought my heart back to confidence in Him, in what we have found to be the way He thinks about us.

In the Lord's Table I find He attaches importance to, our remembering Him; not that we are anything, but if I have a friend I like him to think of me when I am away because I love him. There must be redemption; but this is the expression of the heart of Christ putting us into this place. If Christ takes my heart, I am thinking of pleasing Him. He has possession of my heart; that is really practical sanctification. I judge myself as a poor ruined creature, and walk in intercourse with Christ. Sorrows and troubles I have, but He never changes; and nothing can separate me from His love, for they are only creature things that come on me, and His love is divine, the love of God.

No. 3. God in Christ and man in Christ. October 23rd, 1870.

{Words of Grace for the Household of Faith, Vol. 2 1899, pages 99-106.}

The great point of Colossians 2 is the completeness of the revelation, and our completeness, if we receive it, bringing us out of the old condition into a new. It is remarkable the way the apostle insists here on our completeness before God, and on the completeness of the revelation to us.

It is striking to see - for "there is nothing new under the sun," as the wise man said - how the apostle had to deal with what we have now to deal with: superstition, traditions - ritualism as we call it now - and rationalism, or man's reasoning, which ends in infidelity.

We see how imagination runs to tradition, and the reasoning of the human mind to philosophy; but the apostle insists that everything is in Christ, and that we do not want anything else; and this blessed truth is the revelation of God close to us. As to the way we are brought into it, we are quickened, and forgiven all trespasses.

The apostle calls all these workings of man's mind the "rudiments of the world." Man's mind cannot go beyond his mind, and so it cannot get God, for God is beyond his mind. If I trust to my mind, I may be deceived, for another man may have a cleverer mind than mine, and deceive me; but there is no conscience in it, because if I use my mind, it is not conscience. The whole thing is always false. There is no philosophy but what is false, for it leaves God out. I must live according to the relationship I am in, whether husband and wife, or father and child. If I leave out then the greatest relationship of all, namely, with God, all must be false. When God is brought in, it is not my mind working, because if He is there, I must be subject to Him.

Tradition does not seem to leave God out so much. There may be piety among ritualists, but they do not know their place in Christ. Philosophy is infidelity; they say there are words of God in the Scripture, but it is not the Word of God. Then the mind is to judge it, and everyone takes what he likes. That is man's mind at work.

In ritualism there is no consciousness of our place in Christ; its ordinances are things an unconverted man can do as well as a converted one: he can say prayers - not really pray, of course. There is no worshipping God in spirit. There may be piety, but it goes on the ground that man as man is capable of having to say to God. He can fast, offer money, etc. The Christian does these things in spirit. They are "not holding the

Head." Take the instance of having saints as mediators. If I am one with Christ, how can I get a mediator between us? It looks very fair, humble, and so on, but it denies the whole Christian place. If you are toiling and getting others to go to God for you, then you have not been to God. That makes all priesthood essentially false. There was a priesthood in Israel, because the people could not go to God. Now the veil is rent, and to have a priesthood is denying Christianity. Of course we should pray for one another; but now God is fully revealed, you are completely purged, and you can go to Him: "boldness to enter into the holiest."

A man may be feeling after God, and God working in the conscience to bring him there; but a Christian is one who goes right into the holiest with boldness; he learns he is one with Christ, and he holds the Head.

No one can put the slightest thing between himself and the Head without being lost. If a gold-leaf were between my head and my body, my body might as well be at the other end of Europe; I should be dead. I may have forgiveness without having learned that union.

God treats man now as lost; He is not putting him under probation to see how it will turn out, but telling him how it has turned out. God in grace is come to seek and to save the lost. He gave up looking for fruit from man because the tree is bad - not that man ought not to bring forth fruit. He said at last, "I will send My Son, they will reverence Him," and they slew Him. Then all was over (not for Christians, of course; He does look for fruit when He has grafted the tree). Now it is grace, and he has to compel men to come in by the gospel.

The coming of Christ brought out clearly and decidedly, first, that there was no fruit to be had from man; and second, that if all the fatness of God's house is opened up for the marriage of His Son, they won't come to it. For all the patience He exercised, and the pains and goodness He showed, there was no fruit. Then He says: "My oxen and My fatlings are killed; all things are ready, come to the marriage," and they will not come. Then you get the judgment of man - yours and my judgment. The thing tested is what you and I are. It has not produced fruit, and it will not receive the goodness of God. Repentance cost them too much, and yet it was said, "Except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish."

We see no beauty in Christ that we should desire Him: the things God delights in I don't.

He says, "Publicans and harlots shall go into the kingdom of heaven before you," because the moral man does not feel his need so much as the open sinner. But if I find a crab-tree with five apples on it, it is a crab as much as if there were five hundred on it. No one has anything to boast of. If I had been brought up with thieves (it was God's providence I was not), I should have been a thief; but I am just as much a sinner as if I were.

The prodigal was just as much a sinner, though not degraded in the same way, when he turned his back on his father, as when he ate with the swine. Jeremiah says, "If thou wilt return, return to Me."

If from being a profligate you turn to being moral, what good is it, if you don't get to heaven? The test of the heart is Christ. Christ is presented, and they see no beauty in Him. An infidel can see in Christ a beautiful character, but he sees nothing in the Son of God coming to redeem my soul.

We are not in paradise. How did we get out of it? We were turned out. Have you got back to God? The last Adam was rejected by man, the first by God (not that there is no mercy for him). Then the world came in, that God never made, but that He overrules, an immense system made by Satan to distract the heart from

God, that it may not want God. But it does want Him. The prodigal "began to be in want." Is there no heart here that wants? It may distract itself, but there is a hungering in the soul. "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger." The soul has wants; it may turn to works, hankering after this and that to make you happy, and tired of everything but yourself, which is the only thing you ought to be tired of. Such a one is not at peace with God. You may forget God, and the effect of bringing in the thought of Him makes you miserable. The conscience feels it is not right; you would get away from God if you could; and you can busy yourself with the distractions of the world till judgment comes - then you cannot get away from God.

The world we are in is the world Satan has built up, to make us forget we are out of paradise, and without God. God makes Cain a vagabond, and he goes and builds a city in the land of Nod: the word signifies vagabond. He goes and settles himself there. Then he must have it as comfortable as he can: he has artificers in brass and iron - so have we; and harps and organs - so have we. Man's cleverness has invented these things to hinder our coming to God.

All that is truth, but it is not gospel in the sense of glad tidings.

In Christ is "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." I get God come into the world - God's side of it towards us - all the fulness of God, love and light, bodily. He looks for no fruit from man here. He is the fruit of God's love. He is seeking for no fruit at all, but He is the fruit of God's heart. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses." He never said "Come unto Me" until He had come to them. He did not wait in heaven and say, You get right and then come up here; but He came in sovereign grace where and when they were wrong.

He was the fulness of the Godhead bodily, a Man, born a Man, God thus showing that His delights were with the sons of men; and His dying was the grand testimony to the extent of God's love. He came, sinless, in infinite grace, the light of the world, and God in love in the world, where men were in sins. How dark our hearts are! He may well say, "to turn them from darkness to light." See God Himself, as a Man, talking to sinners, the One sufficiently above sin to talk to those who were in sin. The need of the sinner is the everlasting joy of the saint - Christ. When He has fully manifested all that you are in the light, you find yourself in the presence of perfect love, not imputing the things He has revealed to you. You find life and love come into the world in Christ. Light, confounding you with your sins. Love, showing you how God is dealing as to your sins. Life, eternal life, to live with Him. He could not have us in our sins. He must reveal them in the light, and bring us into God's presence before the judgment, or it is too late. It is humbling, breaking us down, and making us hate ourselves for the sins, but what a blessed thing to have the love that makes me hate my sins! But the love in itself is not enough, for we could not go to heaven with our sins, and He died. "In Him dwells all the completeness of the Godhead" (I alter the word that you may see the connection), "and ye are complete in Him." When I look at His work and at my being in Him, I see I am complete in Him. He found us in death, spiritual death, and He came in grace into actual death: and what has He done, in going there, for those who believe? He came where we were and bore the curse, putting all our sins away. He is the One who puts our sins away, before ever He is our life; "quickened together with Him," born out of His grave as it were. He has borne our sins, and He is life to a person whose sins He has already put away. We get the quickening by faith in Christ Jesus, the Christ who died for my sins before ever He comes into my heart. We are in the place of the Second Man, Christ, members of His body, of His flesh, and His bones. He is our righteousness before God, always appearing in the presence of God for us, and our Advocate if we fail in anything. My place before God is complete in Him. All that I should have had to answer for before God, that my conscience takes cognisance of, repents for, is put away, and I have Christ - complete in Him, have eternal life - am the righteousness of God in

Him, and hereafter the glory. Christ comes in the perfectness of grace to me as a sinner, and I am in the perfectness of righteousness before God in Him. He has quickened us, having forgiven us all trespasses.

Then, if I am in Christ, it is equally true that He is in me, and I am to show forth the life of Christ in my mortal body.

How far can you say these two things? First, all my sins are forgiven. That is one side of it; and if you don't know forgiveness as complete and thorough as Christ's death can give it, you have not got what Christ gives in the gospel. He does not leave us to answer for our sins, or it would surely be judgment.

Then, secondly, can you say you are "complete in Him"?

Having all in Christ, the apostle says he is not going to make Jews of them. He has led everything captive for you. In detail you have everything in Him. What a thought! And how we need it, if we honestly know and judge ourselves. We have poor, even evil thoughts, if not deeds; how little the fibre of our hearts is able to take it in. But it is our own fault, for God is our strength.

How great the comfort of knowing we are in Him! He is life, and He has entirely overcome death. He comes in the power of life to the stronghold of death, and destroys it. We are not subject to death. We shall die, of course, if the Lord does not come first, but it is a beaten enemy. When I die I leave what is mortal; that is all death is, "absent from the body." It breaks all ties here, of course. We were death's prey, now "all things are yours." Death saved me, and death, spiritual death, is my deliverance. Dead to sin and to the world. And when it actually comes, I leave my poor mortal body and go to Christ; and so completely is it overcome that those who live when He comes will not die. "We shall not all die." If Christ came to-night, those who are His would never die.

Have your souls seen the vileness, guilt, self-will, and uncleanness of their condition before God, and seen that you are not there, but in Christ? If I am complete in Him, I want nothing else: it is deliverance; and if my eye is single and turned to Him, I have everything.

The Lord give our hearts to know it every day, that they may be satisfied. "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and He that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

No. 4. Redemption. March 9th, 1871.

{Words of Grace for the Household of Faith, Vol. 2 1899, pages 137-9.}

We get in Exodus 15 the deliverance founded on Exodus 12, and God takes, as to His dealings, an entirely new character.

In chapter 12. He was a Judge, acting in that character, and He is met by the blood. He does not meet the sin; the blood meets the judgment, and He passes over, but the people are left in Egypt, safe from judgment. That is not all that God does: it is the foundation of all blessing, but they had not got actual deliverance yet. There is not only the value of what Christ has done meeting the eye of God, but He is active in delivering us and bringing us out. Christ went down to the condition we were in, and "by the grace of God tasted death for everything." He came into death where Satan's power was. He could not be holden of it, but in coming down He put away the sin. He came down in the power of divine life - He was God Himself - and He not only put away sin, though He did that in order to deliver us, for it could not be done righteously if the sin had not been put away; but now He is up out of it sitting at God's right hand in

glory, and the worth of His work is such that it sets man, in His Person, but as our Forerunner, in the glory of God. There is complete deliverance for us.

God was a Judge in chapter 12. Here in chapter 15. He is a Deliverer, in virtue of that blood.

The Israelites got to the Red Sea, and found they could not go any further, and that is very humbling. It is a much more humbling thing to learn you are without strength than that you are a sinner. God says, "Trust Me and go forward." God is a Deliverer, and there was this much sea, that it protected them on the right hand and on the left. The very thing they dreaded was deliverance to them; they walked through it. We dread death and judgment, but it is through them we are delivered: the death of Christ.

Then they have to go through the wilderness, but they have come to God first. Death is gain, and judgment is gone for the believer.

"He guided them in His strength" (when they had none) "to His holy habitation" "I have borne you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself" Then there is peace.

We are brought to God by His power and righteousness, and the life that was manifested in Christ's resurrection from the dead; and from that there is a reckoning on divine strength for the way. Divine power has come in to deliver. Then what is Satan's power? There is perfect present deliverance from Pharaoh and Egypt, and the people are brought to God Himself by God's own strength. Then that work forms the ground for reckoning on God for the rest.

We see in verse 17 that God has an inheritance for His people. We have not got that (the glory) yet; but what we have got enables us to reckon on Him for it. He brings us to Himself and now dwells among us, consequent on redemption. (See Exodus 29:45, 46.)

The moment I get there, I say, "Holiness becomes thine house." You cannot speak of holiness to a person before he is redeemed; he has nothing to do with it except to say he has none. The Lord is "glorious in holiness," and now He has brought a people to Himself, He must have them holy.

With us it is inward and spiritual. He has redeemed a people to Himself, and He must have their hearts set apart - holy.

In the cleansing of the leper, the blood was to be on the tip of the right ear, on the thumb of the right hand, and on the great toe of the right foot. No thought is to go into our mind, we are to do nothing with our hand, and there is to be nothing in our walk, unfit for the blood of Christ.

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