1 Corinthians (Quality: Average)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 September 1975

Preacher: Delves, Stanley (1897-1978)

[0:00] As the Lord may help me, I will continue the meditation upon the Word in the first epistle to the Corinthians, the third chapter, the ninth verse.

For we are laborers together with God. We are God's husbandry. We are God's building.

The first epistle to the Corinthians, the third chapter, the ninth verse, particularly the first part of the verse. For we are laborers together with God.

We are God's husbandry. I want to repeat what I said this afternoon about the laborers and how the Lord calls them and fits them for that spiritual labor and in what sense we are to understand it, that they are laborers together with God.

Except to connect the subject, I will just say that I feel it is most desirable that the Lord's servant should be regarded in a right light and certainly not in an impartial spirit, preferring one above another from partiality, but with that esteem that the Lord would have his laborers regarded for the benefit and blessing of their ministry.

[2:01] They are laborers together with God. They are laborers together with God in the sense that they are actuated by the same spirit of grace and love with God.

That they are laborers together with God with regard to God's purpose. It is not their purpose that they can perform, but the purpose of God.

And God uses them to accomplish that end. As it is written in Isaiah, As the snow cometh down, and the rain from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and causeth that which is sown in it to spring forth and bud, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth.

It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Now the Lord's servants are laborers with him to that end, that the word must be preached, and so they labor in preaching it. But it is God's purpose with regard to its accomplishment that will be fulfilled.

[3:21] I might add also, without dwelling longer upon it, that the Lord's servants are laborers together with God with regard to his power.

Not of course, that it is a laboring of power in the laborers with the power of God in their labor. It is anything but that, for the Lord's servants come to that of weakness itself.

But then it pleases God to use them, weak as they are, to accomplish his will, and the power to accomplish his will is with him.

My friends, power belongeth unto God only, sovereignly, efficiently, eternally. Power belongeth unto God.

God will exercise his power through the weakness of the laborers. We are laborers together with God.

[4:26] It's weakness laboring with power. But because of the power of God, the weakness in the laborers does not in itself hinder at all the fulfilling of God's purposes through them.

This ought to be an encouragement to us who labor in the ministry of the gospel because we often feel, as Paul said, that I was with you in weakness and fear and in much trembling.

It isn't fear of man. It isn't trembling so much in coming before congregations, but it's the sense of our own insufficiency that makes us fear and tremble.

But then God works through this weakness of ours. I've been sometimes amazed that God should have wrought effectually through some discourse or other that in it I may have felt so weak and really been ashamed of it and felt it was time I gave up preaching.

And yet the Lord has surprised me sometimes by the way which he has wrought through such weakness and I believe the Lord's servants all find the same. For now, I leave them.

[5:47] You are God's husbandry. God's husbandry. Not man's. God's. Man may have his husbandry.

Professed ministers may have their husbandry. And it may seem sometimes as though their husbandry flourishes even more than the husbandry of those who are laborers together with God.

For what is the end of it all? But when the harvest comes what will be true wheat? What will be but worthless tares?

Man's husbandry, it is his worth, will all come to nothing. It will disappear like the chast which the wind drives away. But God's husbandry will stand at last, will be found to have been good husbandry and brought forth eternal fruit.

Now, first of all, I would mention that God's husbandry implies that it is a work wrought within a certain enclosure.

[7:04] Now, because the natural metaphor, of course, goes along with the spiritual teaching here, we know that the husbandman has his defined field in which he works his labor.

Now, there is a field clearly defined in the sight and mind of God within which he works his spiritual husbandry by means of his spiritual husbandmen.

For the world itself as such does not come under God's husbandry. I feel that is unmistakably true.

The whole world lies in wickedness. It always has done and it does now. God's husbandry does not extend to the world as such.

Well, if that might seem somewhat unacceptable to anyone's mind, that God's husbandry doesn't extend to the world, well, how would you explain it?

[8:26] Then the world continues in the condition that it does. Because if God's husbandry extended to the world, the world would come under his culture.

And if the world came under his culture, the world would be fruitful to his glory. God's love to God's husbandry. Now, the world is anything but that. Therefore, we must not consider the world at large and in general terms is the sphere of God's husbandry.

Now, we may consider the sphere of God's husbandry in three aspects of it. Now, first, the whole church of God, as such, is the sphere of divine husbandry.

And then, secondly, every particular, distinct, or to use a common term, every local church is the sphere of God's husbandry.

And then, thirdly, every individual that God deals with graciously, his heart and conscience, well, his soul, then, is the sphere of God's husbandry in his particular case.

[9:49] Now, I would try and make this a little play, if it needs to be a little play. There is, first of all, the one universal church of God.

By that we mean all that number of souls that God has marked out in his eternal purposes of grace to be the subjects of his gracious husbandry.

In other words, all that he has chosen in his electing grace and love to salvation through Jesus Christ. I take as I speak, of course, to a congregation that is listening to me with approval and sympathetically.

But I know that this teaching does cause a good deal of animosity in people's minds, that God should have elected a people to make them the subjects of his saving grace.

grace. But then whatever may be said on these matters, for or against, makes no difference whatever. It is so.

[11:06] It is so. God has said that it is so. And whose word will stand? God's word that declares it, or man's word that opposes it, which will stand?

Now, God's word will stand, and man's word will come to nothing. It is as chart before the wind. God has marked out the whole sphere of his husbandry in his eternal poor knowledge of those that he has appointed unto salvation through Jesus Christ.

Now, all that great number of being redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and redemption marks out the church, the same church.

Prefer to say, having said what I have had about election, lest I should convey any wrong impression, especially to the young people, although it is, I believe, over the word of God before me, an indisputable truth, that God has chosen unto salvation in his eternal purposes of grace, all that ever will be saved.

So that is not to say that election or God in his purposes of election will reject any who sincerely seek salvation through the Lamb's redeeming blood.

[12:55] Remember this, the door of his mercy stands open all day to the poor and the needy who are not by the way, and no sinner shall ever be empty sent back who comes seeking mercy for Jesus' sake.

The gospel sets the door open to sinners. The point is this, the election makes it sure that a great number will enter in through that door who never would enter in through it if God had not chosen them for salvation.

it shuts out none but it ensures that some will enter in. You may look at it like this, of that great number that the apostle John saw in Revelation before the throne of God and the Lamb, a number which no man can number, and constantly engaged with the most heavenly bliss, unhappiness, and love in ascribing all praise and honor to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, there's not one of them would be there if hadn't been that God had chosen them for salvation.

Not one of them. So I just made that clear. Election ensures the church, but it excludes no comers.

you know, the Lord Jesus Christ put it so clearly, all that the Father giveth me shall come to me, that's election, and in that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out, that's the freeness of the gospel.

[14:55] God. I thought I must say that. Now, this is the church, then. It is the sphere of God's husbandry.

The church, marked as and defined by his eternal purpose in election, and by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ for their salvation.

Now, of this one church, we must say that it is invisible in this world as to any organisation. there are three parts to this church.

There is that part which is already in heaven, and I felt how beautiful was that verse we sang just now, how they praise him in heaven, who have gone before us, with what wonder and love and adoration, they do continually sing his praise.

The husbandry is finished in that, the work is done, the full calling in here has been gathered home, laid with eternally to praise him for what he has done for them.

[16:19] Happy psalmsters, when shall lie their praises join. Then, there is that part of the church of God, we often speak of, as a church militant, distinction from the church triumphant.

They are there in this present world, and the work of God's husbandry has already begun in them, and is continually in process, until it is brought to its perfection.

There is that part of the church, still, in nature's death and darkness. But God will bring them in in due time, and deal graciously with them to bring them to repentance, and to the acknowledgement of the truth.

And though they may just now seem to be wandering very far from God, as far as sheep can run, that they will most assuredly be brought into the fold.

For now, that invisible church, part of which is in heaven, part in a state of grace on the earth, and part still in a state of nature to be brought into a state of grace, is the fear of God's husbandry.

[17:51] In some it is finished, in some it is in progression, in some it is not yet begun. Then, we may regard every distinct and local church as being within itself a sphere of God's husbandry.

For it is the appointment and will of the Lord Jesus Christ that those who are called by his grace, brought by repentance to believe in him who are made children of God by a new birth, should be joined together in local spiritual fellowships which the word of God characterizes as churches.

Now, there was the Corinthian church, the Ephesian church, the Thessalonian church, church. These were all distinctive and separate churches, and all of them spheres of divine husbandry.

I think this is a beautiful view to take, churches, and I want to make it all that to appear that by churches, at least in these days, we mean only such as have been baptized and admitted into the fellowship of the church.

They do constitute, I mean, the churches, but what I have in mind now is all who come under the influence and grace of the word where they, by the Lord's bringing them together, gathering his name and worship.

[19:38] But mind you this, it is the scriptural way, and it is the Lord's appointment that all who do come under the gracious work of the Holy Spirit should be joined to the church where it is their lot to gather and regularly to worship.

That's the ideal. But, of course, for various reasons, the ideal is very seldom, if ever, attained to perfectly.

I suppose that there are in most of our congregations, that is, congregations of any considerable number, some who, by the grace of God, are subjects of the work of the Holy Spirit, who are not in the membership of the church.

church. And the Lord graciously give direction and help and guidance to all such in this very solemn and very scriptural consideration.

salvation. And I have felt very much encouraged lately to know that here and there, there has been a coming forward to profess faith and love in the Lord Jesus Christ and to follow him in his appointed ordinances.

[21:06] And the Lord bring forward all such, if it please him, who are possessors of his grace and true believers in Jesus Christ.

Well now, to put it very simply, consider this church here in Mount Zion Chapel. Now the Lord's husbandry has been going on in this church for many years.

First one and then another, we have good reason to believe, have been called and quickened by the power of the Holy Spirit to the preaching of the Lord's servants.

Lord, dead in every generation, this has been so. This church, then, as a church, has been the sphere of divine husbandry.

And how many have not only been called by grace, convinced of their sinful condition, given repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and being plounts of the Lord's right-hand fountain, of being watered and fed and nourished and instructed through the labours of the Lord's servants within the sphere of this church.

[22:29] And that, I would feel, has been so in the church where I labour for many generations. And I feel it is going on still.

Now, the Lord bless every gospel church represented here, and all that he has established according to the rule and the principle that he has laid down in his word.

The Lord makes them fruitful in every good word and word. The Lord gives them grace to walk together in unity and peace and in love.

For every gospel church is the sphere of divine husbandry. But then, as well as that, for every individual called by the grace of God is in himself and in herself, a sphere of divine husbandry.

Their own heart is a sphere in which the Lord works thus graciously. Now, I want to bear more upon that for the rest of the time, you see.

[23:45] And may the Lord make the word instructive and confirming if it please him. What is there in husbandry to which we may compare the work of God and the work of his servants?

And now, we must begin with this. The very first essential in husbandry, natural and spiritual is that the earth should be fertile.

If there were no fertility in the earth naturally, all husbandry would be utterly vain and useless. God has made the earth fertile. Alas, sin, while it has not destroyed the fertility of the earth, has caused it of itself, left to itself, to bring forth briars and thorns.

Now, the state of men, every one, is in just that condition. The heart and mind man is fertile with regard to natural things and evil things.

Oh, how fertile in evil, evil thoughts, evil motives, and evil things is human nature left to itself.

[25:18] We take in mind, for instance, how fertile a thought it is. It was continually thinking, and thinking, and thinking, is bringing forth continual thoughts from the fertility of the mind.

If you consider the heart, how fertile it is, what continual feelings, desires, and affections, the heart is continually bringing forth.

But the sad thing it is, it is, that sin has blighted it. It has not destroyed the fertility of the mind, the mind can still think, but alas, what sinful thoughts it brings forth.

Uh-huh, sin has not made the heart infertile, there are still perfections and desires, but alas, they are alienated from God.

no man's heart and mind of itself will ever bring forth anything that is of spiritual nature. But then, the very first thing in spiritual husbandry in the heart is to make the heart fertile.

[26:34] That is, to make it capable of bringing forth spiritual seed if it's sown there. fertile. And, what makes the heart fertile?

There's only one thing can make it fertile. Absolutely only one, and that is the new birth. The new birth is the bringing forth in the heart of spiritual life, and spiritual life is fertility in the heart.

as soon as there has been a new birth, there is in that heart, that life, which is capable of receiving the seed of the word and bringing forth the fruit of it.

this is the work of God. But what are the laborers? Are they any hand in this?

Yes, verily. No, well, we know that it is the Holy Spirit alone that can bring forth a new life in the heart by the new birth.

[27:48] And there's a mystery about it, and yet it's very simple. For what do I read? Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

And then we read this, all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness of man is a flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower faded away by the word of the Lord endeareth forever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Now, how could that word be preached, that very word by which the soul is born again? How could that incorruptible seed be dropped into the heart, that it should bring forth a new life without the labor of the Lord's servants?

Now, the Lord's servants cannot make the word to have that effect in the heart, but they can preach it and pray that it will have that effect, and it does have that effect because God works effectually by it.

The minister preaches the word, the incorruptible seed of the word, the Holy Spirit causes it to bring forth a new life in the soul, being born again by the word of the Lord which liveth and abided forever.

[29:26] And that is why the apostle says that, although we have many structures, we have not many fathers, for I have begotten you again in the gospel. But the apostle couldn't beget anyone again in the gospel.

All he could do was to preach the word. But God did the other work. God made it effectual to their regeneration, and so Paul was instrumentally their father, that God was really their father in the matter.

God was really their father. Now that is the first thing. Oh we do pray for this. The seed may be good, it may be sowed with many tears, but if there is no life in the soul, there is no fertility.

And so the prophet complains of this same sadness, he said, shall horses run upon the rock, shall one fell there with oxen, the rock can't bring anything forth.

For now, you are God's husbandry, if you have been born again, your heart is fertile to the world, it is in such case as to receive it, as the good ground received it.

[30:54] The seed was the same that fell on all the four kinds of ground, but only the good ground was it productive, and the good ground is spiritual life in the soul.

God's God's husbandry. When the word is soul in the heart, it begins to spring up.

It may affect the heart and does as a rule with convictions of its sinful condition. There are different ways in which the word begins to work in the heart.

With some, their spiritual life and experience begins with distinct and deep convictions of sin. Convictions of sin, I believe, come to every charge of God in different degrees and at different times.

And no one should feel that if their beginning has not been marked by such deep and clear convictions of sin as they know has been so with many, they need not be hung up on that point.

For the Lord can work all that in the heart to a degree. I remember when I came before the deacons of the church when I was quite a young man, about seventeen, and told them as well as I could in my poor lame sort of way what I felt, one of the deacons, perhaps not for the best of wisdom anyway, he said to me, well, you haven't been handled very severely, Stanley.

Well, I hadn't. And I couldn't say what I hadn't felt. However, the time came, my friends, and no word could express my feelings more than this.

I reckon that as a lion, so will he break all my bones. I reckon that from morning to evening he will make an end of me. There is none that you need pray for an experience like that.

I can assure you, you need pray for an experience like that. If the Lord has made your heart receptive of his word and responsive to it, that's enough to thine being.

And if anyone will say, well, that seems rather deficient, who are you to speak of the work of the Holy Ghost as being deficient?

[33:50] I'm not a man to speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in his most gentle forms as being deficient. who am I to reflect it on?

What is the work of the Holy Spirit in that way? Dear God's husbandry, now I have in mind that second parable of the Lord Jesus, we read in the fourth chapter of Mark.

He says, the kingdom of heaven is as a man should cast seed into his field, and should rise and sleep night and day, and it groweth, springeth up, he knoweth not how.

That has been an encouragement to me in this way. We cannot help but feel very concerned about our ministry and effects of it. But after all, we must rise, we must sleep, we must have our rest, and if we were to pass sleepless nights after nights, that in itself wouldn't have any beneficial effect.

He must sow the seed, and then he must sleep and rise. The Lord will do the rest. The Lord will do the rest. And if the Lord's servants are enabled to labor faithfully, solemnly, and fervently, to the best of their ability, well, they earn a good night's rest effort, don't they?

[35:30] It is as a man should so sink into his field, and should sleep and rise, and go on with his labor. But it springs out, and he knoweth not hell.

How beautiful this is described by the Lord Jesus Christ. First the brave, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.

First the blade. And what is the blade? It is the first spring up of the seed of light in the soul. And very often, it springs up in a sense of spiritual desire and very tender feeling.

But if the desire is of grace, it's wonderful. And if the tender feeling, is because the Holy Spirit has made the heart and conscience sensitive, that's a wonderful thing.

Brethren, the work of grace is a miracle. I was only thinking the other night, pondering over it all, about whether it's a miracle that there should be any real spiritual light in your soul, any faith, any love, any hope, is a miracle.

[36:52] And I thought it's a miracle that it should be maintained, that it should live on and on, amidst so much that tends to choke it and oppose it and work against it.

What with unbelieving hearts, a tempting devil and the spirit of the world, it's a miracle that the life of grace in the soul is maintained.

mind. And it's a miracle that it should be completed in eternal glory. You are God's husbandry. So I would speak very tenderly about this springing out of the blade, the first desire towards the things of God.

The seed of word in the heart brings forth desire toward Jesus Christ. And if anyone can feel to understand and respond to a word like this, that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, or to know my Jesus crucified, that far exceeds all things beside.

Oh, it's wonderful that you should feel like that. It's wonderful. You are God's husbandry, if you feel like that.

[38:20] And then, there is the ear. What would you understand by that further development of grace in the soul?

By the ear, I fear we must understand a profession of that thing. Perth the desire, and the principles of faith, well, there must be faith, or there could be no desire at all.

There must be love. No one desires what they've known love for. There's a springing up. Well, where there's faith and where there's love, there should presently be the profession of that faith.

Or, in the word of God, the profession of faith is joined to the possession of faith. It's that way of the confession of the Lord Jesus Christ, of which he has said, him that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father and before his angels.

But beware of the other side of the matter. I know that where there's faith in the heart. If there's no confession of it, salvation is assured, that Jesus Christ is not on it.

[39:45] And there's not that testimony born to his name and truth that should be, as I sometimes said to my people, do these things rightly.

baptism and church membership is not essential to salvation. But it is joined to that which is essential, it is joined to that which is essential, though it's not essential in itself.

And what God has joined together, it becomes not man to put asunder and make a decision between what is essential and what is not essential, and say, I hope for that which is essential, I leave the other, but that's putting aside what God has joined together in his word, that doesn't honour him, and I believe it may have a very stultifying effect upon spiritual life in the soul.

God honours that which honours him. In the keeping of his commandments, there is great reward. I look upon the profession of faith as the earth.

Then, there is a poor corn in the earth. Now, I regard that as being the maturity of grace. The maturity of grace.

[41:14] That faith and love in the heart that is brought forth there by the Holy Spirit through the word comes to a maturity. Experience, materials, some painful experiences, some sweet experiences.

The night, the day, the cold, the warmth, the rain, all tends to the maturity. And all the various kinds or features of spiritual experience, all tend to maturity.

And there's something very beautiful about the maturity of grace. And mind, it isn't just a matter of years. when the whole corn is in here, then immediately he gathers it home.

The Lord can bring grace to maturity in a very few years. But it pleases him usually to a mature grace through years of experience.

Oh, somebody enters into it. The experience we have of ourselves the experience we have of his goodness and mercy, the experience we have of trial, the experience we have of blessing, the experience we have of darkness, and the experience we have of light, all tends to mature.

[42:46] The full calling here. And the maturity of grace is likeness to Jesus Christ. And I fear there's nothing more beautiful to a spiritual mind than to see a growing likeness to Jesus Christ and the spirit getting more heavenly as it getting nearer heaven.

And then the harvest. Now the time is quite more than gone and I must close the meditation. if I may have just a word with patience of the friends, I would like to say this.

My age and the weakness that has come upon me through the heart attack that laid me aside for some weeks in the year has put considerable restriction on my strength and vigor and the time has come and I must restrict the extent of my labours and so I feel that this is really wise for me to not to accept engagements for special services on Saturdays because of the Lord's Day services and on Mondays.

And so I shall not be coming again on this occasion. And I feel I would like to say with much affection and appreciation how much affectionate I've received among the friends here.

I've been coming here on these occasions around about 40 years. I think with only one year's intermission through illness and from the first day that good Mr.

[44:48] Goss invited me to take these services till now I've received nothing of kindness and affection from the friends here at Mount Zion both in their homes in receiving me and in our assembly.

there's a sadness in feeling that one's labours becoming restricted but I must have feel as a good deacon said to me and I explained my position to him he said well all has come and last and end as shall please our heavenly friend.

and that was really very good to me about what quality is so all has come and last and end and what I feel with regard to my reception my affectionate and kind reception here I've met with very much in Bedfordshire and I have come to feel a very deep and tender affection and unity and spirit with my friends in this area and in Bedfordshire and if it is the Lord's will I may yet be able to enjoy their fellowship and perhaps be of some use to them still in a ministry but the end must come and I feel the great concern now is to be prepared for the call and as I read that chapter tonight that closing verse seemed to have a voice to me and then the evening must come they passed over unto the other side and the evening must come the evening of life the evening of our ministry oh it will be well if it isn't just passing over it must all do that but if it is with the

Lord let us pass over unto the other side very pleasingly I wish the Lord's blessing to all to the friends who have shown me such kindness and to the churches and congregations to which I've ministered with acceptance and with spiritual pleasure to meet with them the Lord bless you all the Lord bless every one of his dear servants and prepare us all for that blessed harvest home of the last Amen who felt the same dear friends as you have just heard

Mr. Bell say that it was over 40 years since he first came to us here at Watford for these harvest thanksgiving services as also he said to tell him that there is one section who is continual through those years for we as a church and as a people also feel as Mr.

Dell himself feels that this is the last time on which he feels that he can have paid for this engagement and out order to part of some engagement by hand and by your saviour both on behalf of the church here and other dear friends that meet with us we have truly and I think those that gathered before I came here have truly appreciated that ministry there have been times when souls have been truly property as I sometimes say to my little property that that where his soul is property shall be down and must be down to the honour and glory of them and may God in his mercy rich and our dear man our fellow and our father in the day in the closing days of things may he bless and bless him and bless his own and that appointed time give unto him an abundant end place in the that he shall reap his desire to

Mr. Jones on behalf of the friends of the church here and the others who gather with us the Lord bless you we close our services singing hymn 631 to 234 after the singing together at this hearing we will remain standing for the benediction and after the benediction has been pronounced we will conclude with the gospel the

Lord himself be with you all teach you his own will and guide you save from every fall to Zion heavenly hill 631 watch what i it men each- and- own till and return to God bless you.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear.

[52:25] To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

[53:51] To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

[54:59] To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Savior let me hear.

To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear. To the Lord let me hear.

Thank you.

[56:16] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[58:46] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.