

Following on from Christ the First fruits (Quality: Average)

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[0 : 00] Amen. The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 26, verses 22 and 23.

Having, therefore, obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles.

It has been upon my mind that this day, or this corresponding date, this Fourth Lord's Day of April, is the 20th year since I first came on this corresponding date.

It was not the first time that I preached here, that was in the previous year, in 1971 in July, but through those 20 years we have continued to come.

There are many changes we have seen in our own hearts, and you look back to yours.

[2 : 33] Many of our dear younger friends and children were not born. Others that were children have grown up and married. grandchildren have grown up and grown up and grown up and grown up.

But nevertheless, the minister's experience must not be in front of his preaching, but it is needful that it should be behind.

Many things that the servants of the Lord preach, they have passed through themselves, sometimes in deeper waters than those for whom they speak.

The apostle Paul was now advancing in years. The first time we hear of him was as a young man, at the stoning of Stephen, when the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

He was now about to take the voyage to Rome, where he dwelled for two more years.

[4 : 13] And then we have silence in the scripture, but he does write to Timothy in the second epistle of how he was now ready to be on the time of his departure.

We can look back wrongly, but there is also a right looking back.

In the eighth of Deuteronomy, we are told, Thou shalt remember all the life, not only the pleasant, but also the painful, not only the trials, the temptations, the battles, but also the Lord's blessings and favors.

Thou shalt remember all the ways of the Lord thy God has led to him, these forty years in the wilderness. And while he suffered thee to hunger, that he might make thee know that man doth not lift thy blade home, but by every word that proceedeth out of thee, the amount of blood.

What will the next twenty years hold for you and I if time continues? Some of us will then be very elderly indeed if we are still alive.

- [5 : 52] But we shan't, this will happen. I can remember the time when I was a boy at Oakington and I used to think if only I could live to the age of Methuselah.
- That was my desire. My treasure was here below. I was not seeking those things which are above.
- What are you seeking, young and old? Where is your treasure? Bring yourself to this test.
- When you wake in the night, and I ask you to try this, whether young people or middle-aged or elderly, where do your thoughts generally go?
- Divide them into two groups. Are they the things of time? What you did on the past day, what you hope to do on the next, the garden, the car, the occupation, the school, and all the things of this life.
- [6 : 59] Or are they, on the other hand, spiritually? Prayers concerning forthcoming services. Meditations upon what you've heard in the past.
- Prayers for love, for the Lord's work to be prospered upon all. I say, where do you thoughts come?
- Which one is it? There is your heart, and there is your treasure. Where the heart is, there will the treasure be.
- Where the treasure is, there the heart will be. But the Apostle had passed through many things that we need not enter into now.
- He mentions them elsewhere, of how many times he had been stoned, shepherded, day and night he had spent in the deep, and so on. But, let us ask ourselves, have we obtained how could we?
- [8 : 10] He did. He did. But how is it with you and I? It is said that there is three steps into the pulpit, but we could also say the same three steps into each pulpit.
- Lord, help me. Lord, help me. Is that your prayer?
- Was it your prayer as you came here this evening? Every heart knows its own burdens. But what a mercy if there are at times when the Lord's servants are able to enter into your path.
- We have known such when they have spoken of things that, in which we were in, that we have not even mentioned to our nearest and nearest. And they have described them as if they knew all about it.
- The Lord directed their thoughts and their words were made of help.
- [9 : 27] But who needs the help? It is those that feel their need, that feel their need.
- do you feel your helplessness? The apostle writing to the Corinthians speaks of that thorn in the flesh.
- We do not know and would not speculate what it was, but clearly it was a painful thing too. And three times he besought the Lord that it might be removed.
- we might easily think surely a prayer of the apostle Paul will be answered immediately and most certainly after three times.
- Well, I believe his prayer was answered, but it was not in the way that he expected. We touched upon this a little this morning that God is sovereign in the way that he works.
- [10 : 36] Paul's prayer was answered not by the thorn being removed, but by him being given grace to bear it.
- The Lord said unto me, my grace is sufficient for this. He said, most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmity that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

He said, when I am weak in myself, that is, then am I strong. When I am strong in my own strength, then am I weak.

we sometimes sing in that beautiful hymn that Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.

If I may so put it, Satan does not tremble when he sees a strong saint on his knees. Satan's strength is stronger than that of the strongest saint, but he is weaker than the weakest saint that is trusting in the Lord.

[12 : 07] Do you have to come upon your knees spiritually, though I do firmly believe often the Lord's people have to fall upon their knees physically as well?

Do you know those secret places of the stairs as it were? Do you know those promptings of the Holy Spirit when you have to leave the family circle, it may be, to retire to your bedroom or the bathroom and bolt the door and pull on your knees and pull out your heart before the Lord.

That is when you are a weak saint on your knees and Satan is weaker than that. For you are trusting in me.

Having therefore obtained help of God. One thing of that beautiful psalm, psalm 27, in which the psalmist was able to say, thou hast let me be, let me be, let me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

God, one of my blessings under the ministry, from that text, preached by Mr. Hayler in 1941, when I was in the depths of soul, and how often, one might say almost daily, in over 50 years, that has been one's prayer, leave me not, neither for Satan, O God of my salvation.

[14 : 05] Having therefore obtained help of God, how often we have to prove, as one said, that vain is the help of life.

We sung this morning for our closing hymn, could the creatures help all these are seldom, should we think of players, who if any, come to Jesus, till we do to self-respect.

I continue unto this day. I often exhort those to whom I more regularly speak, to look as it were at the small print of the scriptures.

You know when we have something to sign, we are often told to read carefully the small print. It often sets things forth in a different light.

The apostle said, this die. Moses in that 90th psalm, so often read at the beginning or end of the year, prayed this prayer, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

[15 : 35] If Moses had meant years, he'd have said years. If we were asked how old we were and felt disposed to say, we'd say so many years.

But he didn't say years. some time ago I had tea before preaching at a certain place in the evening with a family and I was told it was the tenth birthday of one of the children.

And I said to her, quoting that verse from Psalm 90, I said, how many days old are you? One of her brothers soon said 3,650, forgetting of course there must have been at least two, possibly three meetings.

But do we number our days? Not only the days that are past, but the days yet allotted to us.

When I was in the army in Germany in the late 1940s, longing to be demobilised, like many others I wrote a series of numbers and hung it on the bottom of the bed, 199, 98, each night crossed off one more.

[16 : 57] Time seemed to go slowly in the 90s and 80s. It went much quicker when we got in the teens and the years. But so the days of our life are fast, slipping away, and eternity is before us each.

How does that word strike you? The poet put it like this, eternity tremendous sin to guilty souls a dreadful wound.

But, oh, if Christ and heaven be mine, how sweet the accent, how divine.

we have quoted the apostle's words to Timothy in the second epistle, there he was longing to depart. He speaks elsewhere of desiring to be with Christ, which is Father.

I am firmly persuaded there will be no reluctant saints in heaven. There will be no reluctant saints in heaven. the Lord will loosen the things that hold us to this life, sooner or later, here at the evening, there pain and affliction.

[18 : 36] These things all come, especially we have observed upon the age. During the war, we used to see in this city the barrage balloons held down by many ropes.

And I, in that, that illustrates the words of the poet, our hearts are bound unto the earth by strong and various times, but every trial breaks a stream and urges us to rise.

here we are tied to this, the Lord cuts the strings, there we are attached to that, he severs that one, and then when the last string is as it were severed, the soul rises to be with us.

Continue to this now, but we know not the many days we have our life to. I remember and felt it solemnly speaking some time ago from those words to Hesikah set thine house in all, for thou shalt die and not live.

This except we are spared to the Lord's second coming lies before the sea. Some years ago I, on the January 1st, as I woke in the morning, I did feel the spirit of prayer for some word to remain from my mind through the air.

[20 : 35] And opening the scriptures, I came across that word, I think it is in Jeremiah, this year thou shalt die.

This year thou shalt die. And it was a very solemn word to me. Though even as it came I realised that it might not refer to spiritual death, but to death in trusting in ourselves, in our own righteousness, in our own work for salvation.

This is what the apostle was referring to when he said, I die daily. Daily he had to prove there was no salvation in his own heart.

But nevertheless it was still a solemn word to me, though as we have seen we did not die naturally. having obtained help of God I continue on to this day, now he was able to say, he continued to this day witnessing, witnessing both to small and white, to young and old, to children in grace, to those that were strong and could eat as it were strong meat to which he refers elsewhere.

But this is not just a word for ministers out. Ye are my witnesses, Seth the night.

[22 : 20] What sort of a witness do you and I make? Comparatively easy as it were to gather round his word on the Lord's day with his people, but how about Monday morning?

How about when the world wants to know what you were doing on the past day? Aren't they ashamed of Jesus? Witnessing, being faithful in those things that come in our hearts and speaking of what we have known and past.

I referred this morning to John the Baptist disciples how they were able to return to John the Baptist speaking of what they had seen, how the deaf are here and the blind see and so on.

what a man if we are able to witness to all what he has done, not what we have done for him, but what he has done for us.

And he said, witnessing, saying, none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first to rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

- [24 : 13] There are many things that are unable to speak in the preaching of the world, to speak of the pathway, of the trials of faith, as we tried to touch upon this morning, but there is that one great subject to which we have to return continually, sin and salvation, the malady, and the vanity, to hold up a gracious Christ before repenting sin, to speak of him.

God's will be not to speak of the Bible. It is not something, in the scriptures, the Old Testament, to which the apostle doubtless had referred, which the prophets and Moses did say should come, remembering that as we read in Luke 24, when the Lord spoke to the two on the way to Emmaus, we read he reproved them and said, O fools, and slow apart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

As if they believed some of the things that the Messiah would come, but they didn't believe that he'd be put to death. Slow apart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory and beginning at Moses and all the prophets he spoke of the things concerning himself.

Well, we have this redeeming work of Christ, of his precious blood, set forth from the beginning of Genesis.

- [26 : 27] In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, when guilt entered, loathed themselves with big leaves. But guilt still remained, you notice.

If guilt had still not remained, they would not have hidden themselves in the trees of the garden. God, does this enter into your experience?

When you were first convicted of your sins, did you try to clothe yourself in works of your own righteousness? Where it was not a conviction of the Holy Spirit, this will satisfy, satisfy, this will satisfy, but not where it is the work of the Spirit, guilt will still remain.

And as then the Lord said, Adam, where are I? And briefly he clothed them in the skins of animals, blood was shed.

And then as the apostle writes in the 11th of Hebrews, by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than that of Cain.

- [27 : 50] Cain thought of the works of his own hands, the fruit of the fields, he saw no need for the shedding of love, but Abel saw Jesus Christ by faith.

It's a solemn consideration you can meditate as the Lord enables you upon it, that the first man that was born went to hell, that was Cain, the first man to die went to heaven, that was Abel.

Abel saw by faith Jesus Christ nor offered a sacrifice and so we might go through how beautifully we find with Joseph's coat of many colors, it had to be dipped in blood, as the many colors set forth a rainbow and the covenant of the Lord toward his feet, and Jacob or Israel as he is referred to there, looked upon that coat dipped in blood, beautiful type of the father, looking upon his people, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, he looked upon that coat of many colors dipped in blood, and said, it is my son's coat, it is my son's coat, Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are my glory, so, misflaming world in thee, the ride with joy, shall I lift up my heart, and then briefly, concerning the Lord and the things set before us there, the past there was to be death in every house, if there was no death of a lamb or a kid of the goats, there would be the death of the eldest son, from

Pharaoh upon his throne, to the captive in the dungeon, and the Lord's people were told to put that blood in their base, and with a plant hyssop to strike it on the lintel and the side post of the houses where they were, and the Lord said, when I see the blood, I will pass over you.

That lamb was to be of the first year, a lamb without blemish, beautiful type of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 58] As a lamb of the first year, he's in the prime as it were, so he was cut off in the prime of man, not as an old man, and without blemish, there was no sin, no guile, was found in his man.

And then, through the many sacrifices that were offered under the Lord, the blood that sprinkled the mercy seat, the mercy seat being the lid that covered the ark of the cover, blood was sprinkled before it and apart.

When we approach the mercy seat in France, what should be our plea? Is it plea? is it not the precious blood of Christ?

And as the apostle writes in the ninth of Hebrews, how, that under the law almost all things were purged with blood.

Moses took the blood of cows and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop and sprinkled both the book and all the pigs, saying, this is the blood of the testament which God has enjoined unto you.

[32 : 30] And without shedding of blood is no remission. Without the shedding of the precious blood of Christ, there is no remission of your sins or my sins.

remission of Christ. And then moving on rapidly to the prophets, how beautifully eyes are in that 53rd chapter, was able under inspiration to speak of the coming of Christ.

commencing with our view of Christ in our unregenerousness, that he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, no beauty that we should desire, despised and rejected of men and sons.

God, but he was wounded for our transgressions. Always notice the tense that he used in the word of God, past tense, present tense, or future tense.

He was, nearly 2,000 years ago, he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities.

[34 : 00] The chastisement of our peace was upon him, all those things nearly 2,000 years ago, but with his stripes we are, in 1992, we are him.

He was oppressed, he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He is now, in the preaching of the gospel, he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shield as he's done, so he opened not his mouth.

And that tenth verse, we've never spoken of it by the way of a text, but often as it were stood and amazed at the depth of that there is it.

It pleased the Lord to bruise him. He hath put him to grave. It pleased the Father that the son should be bruised and put to grave.

Was there love love like this? God so loved the world, people from amongst all nations, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting love.

[35 : 45] well might the poet say, God only knows the love of us. Consider it in this little illustration, we who are parents or grandparents would willingly give our lives to save our child's life.

Thousands in the world would do the same. it is a common parental love and affection, willing to give life for our lost.

But we have a far greater love here than that. Would you give the life of your child to save an enemy's life?

And that's what we have here. While we were yet enemies, writes the apostle, Christ died for us. God so loved his people that he gave his only begotten son.

And he went on to say to Nicodemus, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted.

[37 : 09] man. Have you considered that figure? We read of it, of course, in the book of Numbers. The brazen serpent made, lifted up.

There were three types of people in the wilderness. there were those who were not bitten by the fiery serpents, who left their carcasses in the wilderness in unbelief.

The poet speaks of that bite as a lively type of deadly guilt. They left Egypt behind, left the world behind, as each of us have this evening.

We've each left the Egypt outside behind. But sadly, some died never lionizing their guilt.

Then solemnly, others were bitten by the fiery serpents and perished, never looking for the brazen serpent. A natural conviction.

[38 : 12] But bless his name, there were the third bitten by the fiery serpents who did look, and he that looked lived.

Here we have the gospel set forth. Only to see something, the four things must be our essential.

There must be life. If there's no life, there'll be no seeing. There must be life. There must be the eyes open.

We must be awake. And how close that comes. Sadly and solemnly, often, we get into spiritual sleep, and we're not looking, seeing, there.

No, we are living. And fourthly, there must be light. This comes in the latter part of the next verse. But not all had the same view.

[39 : 23] There were thousands of Israelites. Some were close to the brazen serpents, saw every detail, as it were. Some were in the uttermost parts of the camp, saw but the outline, as it were.

But he that saw it, lived. None other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should sigh.

We have not, this year, perhaps, unusually, been considering that Easter the startling of the past. Perhaps it was, in that sense, saved before this evening.

It would be a sad reflection upon our state of soul, if we only consider his death and resurrection once a year. Christ should suffer, but never think it was the sufferings of his body that made atonement the earth.

We have no right to think he suffered more than others. The two thieves lingered longer upon the cross than he did, apart from the fact he was scourged and had the crown of thorns and some lingered upon the cross for days.

[41 : 01] Now, as Isaiah wrote, he shall see the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. It was the sufferings of his soul that made atonement for sin.

But do we, as the apostle wrote, I think in Romans 8, do we suffer with him in his sufferings for our sins?

We suffer with a person in proportion to our bond of love. we may have gone into the hospital to visit one we love and we perhaps enter the ward and don't know which bed they're in.

And we look on the right hand and we see one there in weakness and helplessness. And we see another on the left hand. But he's not the one we've come to see.

And then perhaps at the distance we see the one we've come to visit. And when we see their weakness and their pains and sufferings upon their face our heart goes out to them because of that bond of love.

[42 : 29] If we suffer with them we shall be glorified together. And then to go another step further when by faith we believe we cause those sons.

We cause them. How well the poet puts it I think in hymn 152 or there 153 in the second part those or there came to see if he is true.

They did, my brother. So did we. The soldier pierced his side. It is true, but we have pierced him through.

Amen. Oh, what a mercy if by faith we can believe he suffered for us.

We then in our turn will suffer with him. That Christ should suffer and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead.

[44 : 07] Now we read this morning of Jairus' daughter being brought to life. We have the widow's son at night. We have Lazarus. In the Old Testament we have both Elijah and Elisha being here.

But Christ raised himself. I have power to lay down my life. I have power to take it again.

No man pays it for us. And how beautifully this is set forth in the 23rd, I think it is, of Leviticus.

Concerning the first fruit. Remembering as the Apostle writes to the Corinthians in the 15th chapter, that Christ is the first fruit of them that slain.

Notice the day in which the first fruits were to be waved before the Lord. Ye shall bring the first fruits of your harvest unto the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord to be accepted for you.

[45 : 28] On the morrow after the Sabbath, the priest shall wave. The morrow after the Sabbath.

The first day of the week. The seventh day was the Jewish Sabbath. Christ did not rise on the Sabbath day of the Jews, but the first day of the week.

The first fruits of them that slain. I fear we do not speak enough of the resurrection of Christ.

As we read the preaching of the Apostles in the book of the Acts, in vain, they brought in the resurrection of Christ. And how often this was the arrived.

The Greeks of Athens and others could readily give freedom that an innocent man was put to death.

[46 : 42] This occasion, no surprise. They probably knew of some instances themselves. But when he made mention of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.

And others said, we will hear thee again. And so it was with Festus here, when he made mention of Christ rising from the dead, Festus said with a loud voice, thou art beside thyself.

Much learning doth make thee mad. But how vitally important is the resurrection of the dead. If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen.

And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching rise. And your voice is also rise.

If the dead rise not, then is not Christ rise. And if Christ be not risen, your faith is done.

[47 : 56] Ye are yet in your soul. But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first witness of heaven that's left.

That he should rise from the dead and should show light unto the king and to the gentiles.

I am the way, he said, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by death.

Has that light shone into your heart? The apostle speaks of it here. We read of the actual record of it in the ninth of the Acts. And twice here in another place, the apostle recounts of what the Lord has done for him.

how he journeyed to Damascus and saw in the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun shining about him and then the journey brings as this light shone into your soul.

[49 : 23] glorious light. Glorious light. That Christ should serve and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead and should show light unto the king and to the gentiles.

On the first occasion that I came here, I preached from the thirteenth chapter of this book a very similar word.

Be it known unto you, therefore, men and blessed men, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of marriage.

Well, may this preaching of the gospel be in your heart and heart that Christ died and rose again from the dead.

Amen. The last tune is number 1059 in Gadsby Selection and the tune is Langton, number 14.

[51 : 21] Jesus, the truth, the way, the sure, unerring light, on thee, my feeble soul, I'd stay, which thou canst lead aright among the resonanging ofopes.

Amen. Amen. . .

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