

Christ's Ministry of Prayer from the Cross

Rev. J. Greendyk

- Psalter 42A:1,3
- Scripture: Luke 23:25-45
- Text: Luke 23:34
- Psalter 47:1-5
- Psalter 140:all
- Psalter 277:3, 5, 6, 8

Dear congregation, very often when a child of God faces death, then family members and other children of God desire to hear some testimony of the precious work of God in his soul. The Bible gives several accounts of dying saints. We can read the testimony of Joshua in Joshua 23:14, "And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth." Before Joshua departs, he leaves this testimony of the Lord, "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." There is another testimony of a saint in the Scriptures, boys and girls, whom we know as Simeon. He held the Christ child in his arms and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." So overwhelming was the revelation of the Son of God and His love to him, that he concluded it was better to depart and be with the Lord. Again, we can read of Paul's parting words in 2 Timothy 4:6-8: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing."

It is evident in all these testimonies, that the focus has not been on self, but on the very faithfulness and love of God. These saints have gloried in the salvation of God provided through the Lord Jesus Christ, and applied to their souls by the Holy Spirit. Must we not say that these testimonies are a declaration that the Lord will remember His Church unto the end of time? Yet, we must also say that the greatest and richest dying testimony is that of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of all His

sufferings on Calvary's cross.

It is Jesus' testimony at death that we wish to meditate upon with you, from the text words found in Luke 23:34:

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,"

This text speaks to us of *Jesus' Ministry of Prayer from the Cross*. We will examine two thoughts. *First*, His Ascending Prayer to His Father, and *Secondly*, His Condescending Love for Transgressors.

Jesus' Ministry of Prayer from the Cross

1. Jesus' ascending prayer to His Father.

Congregation, if we look back in Luke 3:21, when the Lord Jesus began His public ministry, we read, "It came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened."

What was one of the central, critical, and fundamental elements of the Lord Jesus Christ while on earth? What should also be the fundamental, essential element within every believer? What is it that keeps grace alive in the soul? What is it that maintains communion between the Lord and the soul? What is the avenue whereby His people draw down blessings from heaven? What is the activity that His church is called to persevere in on a daily basis? Could you easily answer that, children of God? Or is your mind racing to find an answer? Maybe the boys and girls could answer it. What is a critical thing in the life of a child of God? Prayer! Prayer is the very breath and life of the soul. Jesus reveals, church of God, that our lives must be flavored with prayer. We are commanded by the apostle Paul, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes, 5:17). We are to develop a habitual lifestyle of prayer. This is exactly the example the Lord Jesus sets before us at the beginning of His public ministry.

We also know, as the Lord Jesus traveled over the earth and went about performing good, that He often went apart into a mountain to pray. This clearly teaches us the paramount importance of prayer. By means of prayer the Lord is also pleased to bless the unconverted. "Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them" (Ezek. 36:37). Don't you

and I need temporal, but especially spiritual blessings?

The Lord Jesus now comes to the close of His ministry on earth, and we observe Him in the same frame of mind. He portrays the necessity of communion with His Father. Jesus needed His Father's presence and strength. Jesus prays for compassion and mercy to sinners, to enemies, to rejecters of the truth, and those who have shown an intense hatred for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us turn our eyes to the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross. Jesus has been in the hall of judgment and has heard, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" He has heard their desire for Barabbas. "And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will" (Luke 23:25). Jesus had endured mocking in the hall of Caiaphas. He had been beaten on the head with a reed. He endured whipping on His back. Yet, on the cross, His prayer does not cease for enemies and Christ rejecters. His prayer does not cease for those who saw no beauty in Him. It does not cease for those of His own nation of whom it was said, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not* (John 1:11).

While Jesus was on earth, did He not perform many acts of mercy? Did not His mouth declare His fullness and sufficiency? Did He not say that He was "come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10)? Had not the eyes of the Lord Jesus looked upon Jerusalem with compassion, seeing them perishing in the midst of all their sin? Yet, on the cross He prays for these His enemies. He prays for the same people among whom He had labored. He prays for those who saw His powerful acts, for those who heard of the greatness of His love. He prays for enemies! Oh, see the forgiving nature of Jesus' prayer! When His enemies spitefully use Him, He says, "Father, forgive them."

His prayer. reveals that He harbors no enmity, and holds no grudge. He reveals true humility and meekness in praying for those who torment Him. Observe His great love from the cross. This prayer shows that He longs for the true forgiveness of His enemies, rather than their just, self-made destruction.

Listen again! "Father, forgive them." The root meaning of the name *Father* is protector and upholder. Thus, as the Lord Jesus is hanging between heaven and hell — soon to be rejected by His Father, already rejected by mankind — He cries,

"Father!" Has His prayer ever come home to your heart of enmity and rejection? Have you, my friend, been convinced of your rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you been convicted of your enmity against the gospel? Have you seen the sin of unbelief in your life? Did not Jesus testify unto men, "Believe on me and thou shalt be saved"? What have you and I done, my friend? Isaiah wrote, "We have turned every one to his own way." He speaks to us of our spiritual blindness, yet we do not seek for healing from Him. Jesus spoke of His ability to save, but we are content with our lack of ability.

Congregation, to reject the Lord Jesus Christ has dreadful consequences. Yet, how amazing! He prays, "Father, forgive them." Why did He say "Father"? The Lord Jesus knew what He yet had to face. He would have to hear the two mocking malefactors in cruelty say, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us* (Luke 23:39). Oh, how He needed the upholding and protection of His Father, especially during the last hours of intense suffering, a suffering so intense, it is beyond our understanding! Child of God, you will never go through the depths of hell as Jesus did; you may have afflictions, and be overcome with all types of troubles. Satan may come with his fiery darts and try to pierce into your soul that you are the greatest hypocrite. Your own conscience may condemn you. Yet, God will justify you. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Rom. 8:33). You may say, "My heart defiles me, and the grace of God wrought in my soul seems to be gone," yet listen to whom Jesus prays in His troubles. Jesus, in the midst of afflictions, as He is enduring the heaviest trials, and the swelling tide of God's wrath, breaks the silence with a tender, confident expression, "Father." He says as it were, "Father, remember Me. Father, uphold Me. Father, enable Me, to glorify Thy name, and to show forth that grace and that salvation that there is provided from our side to fallen sinners, Oh Father, uphold Me in this last hour."

Indeed we must say, since the Lord Jesus was the Son of God, it was His divine nature that upheld His human nature. It was His divine nature that kept the avenue of prayer open to His Father. Thus, He could still pray, "Father, forgive them."

Oh congregation, what a wonder are the words of our text, "Father, forgive them." Christ speaks these words when He is just about to face the desertion of His Father; when He cries out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet,

what does the Lord Jesus do? He shows self-sacrifice. He shows His intense love for His church. He says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet, here He prays for those who justly deserved to be forsaken. Here He prays for those to whom He could have said, "I will destroy thee with one word of my mouth." He prays for His enemies.

While experiencing His Father's divine wrath against sin, which He knew could not be satisfied in any other way than by death, Jesus still reveals the tenderness of His heart. The intimate communion between Father and Son is clearly visible, also on the cross.

People of God, how is that blessed relationship between God the Father and your soul? How is it between the Lord Jesus Christ and your soul? Has this word ever come home to your heart? Here in the midst of His suffering, He would pray for the forgiveness of our sins, church of God. The Lord Jesus is not praying for the forgiveness of all mankind, as we can see clearly revealed in John 17:9, "I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou hast given me." We can see the fulfillment of these words from Isaiah 53:12 where it says, "He was numbered with the transgressors; . . . and made intercession for transgressors." Thus we must say that the Lord Jesus does not pray for all sinners, but He is praying for His people. "Father, forgive them." Has not this prayer been answered over the ages? Was not this prayer also answered on the day of Pentecost? Why? This prayer is answered before the throne of His Father, through His own meritorious sacrifice. Therefore the sins of His people *will* be forgiven. Here is the assurance of the forgiveness of sins: "Father, forgive them." Why may we say the assurance of forgiveness? Because the Lord Jesus said, regarding His prayers, "My Father heareth me always."

Therefore, if at this moment, some in our midst are bowed down under a load of sin, and must write death across all their works, and confess the Lord right and just in their condemnation, hear the voice of Jesus ascending to His Father, "Father, forgive them." It is possible that you see no fruit in your tree. Yet, you cannot leave off seeking the God of your existence, that God who is so good to you. Why? Because His love has been shed abroad in your heart. You are seeking Him who has sought you, though you never sought Him. Oh, here is the testimony from the

mouth of the Lord Jesus that forgiveness is for guilty sinners, forgiveness is for wretched sinners, forgiveness is for repenting sinners, forgiveness is for poor bankrupt sinners, forgiveness is for those who have learned that all their righteousness is as filthy rags. Do you know what we must also say? There could be many in our midst who are unconverted for whom the Lord Jesus has prayed this prayer. You would say, "How could that be?" Oh, because in God's sovereign decree He has determined a time when He will arrest a sinner; when He will awaken a sinner; how and in what way He will convict a sinner; how He will strip that sinner naked of everything of self, and how He will reveal that fullness of forgiveness in and through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Here, therefore, is a prayer that may be for you, young man, for you, old woman in our midst, must yet be fulfilled as this prayer was fulfilled fifty-three days later on Pentecost. Jesus prays for His enemies.

Christ prays in the last hours of His life for enemies. Now what a wonderful thing it is, congregation, that these words are written in the Scriptures, "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them." It reveals the dying love of the Lord Jesus. He did not forsake His mission in His intense sufferings towards the end of His life. No, He continues as that faithful intercessor before the throne of His Father. In the midst of His humiliation and suffering He yet delights to pray for sinners. Oh congregation, has that ever overwhelmed you that the Lord Jesus would pray for sinners? He could have justly said, "There is no need to pray for you." He could justly have said, "I will not make satisfaction for you." He could have justly said, "There is not sufficiency in Me for you." Oh, but what does He do? He prays for the forgiveness of sinners. Congregation, that's incomprehensible, but at the same time that's love. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ on the cross makes intercession for transgressors, Oh, see the gracious activity at the time of His crucifixion! He is yet intervening on behalf of sinners, sinners who have nothing but bad thoughts of Him; sinners who have murderous thoughts towards Him; sinners who are filled with unbelief; sinners who gnashed on Him with their teeth; sinners who have forsaken Him; sinners who have said, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways"; sinners who have said, "We will not have this man to rule over us." Yet Jesus prays for sinners. Oh, meditate upon this reality! While He endures the

intense wrath of His Father, while He drinks the bitter cup of sin and condemnation which His church deserved to drink, as the sun is scorching His body, as the nails tear His flesh, yet Ye prays for sinners! Oh, what an act of love! It was *love* that nailed Him to the cross. One of our Puritan forefathers said: "Christ in the very act of His sufferings, seeketh mercy for the instruments of His passion. Their rage had brought Him to the cross, and there Christ mediath to bring them to heaven." Oh congregation, who can fathom the depths of Jesus' love? Who can speak of the power of His intercessory prayers on the behalf of sinners?

But before we go further, let us sing together Psalter 140, all stanzas.

2. Jesus' condescending love for transgressors.

Congregation, think about it for a moment. While the blood of the Lord Jesus is dripping from the wounds in His hands, Jesus is testifying at the same time from the cross, that My blood cleanses from all sin. Oh, He is saying, "Father, forgive them." He is giving His church the very testimony that His blood is all-powerful. He is giving the testimony that His blood gives pardon and peace. He gives the testimony in this text, I do this for those who know not what they do. He is declaring that His blood is sufficient. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," reveals not only the present sufficiency of His blood, but also the future sufficiency of His blood. .

Dear congregation, if there is one thing you and I stand in need of today, it is the blood of Jesus Christ. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that you need, even if you know not what you do, even if you are ignorant of all your sins. This blood which drips from the cross not only preaches present forgiveness, future forgiveness, and past forgiveness for all His people; it also preaches loudly that there is blood yet for that sinner who is dead in trespasses and sins. Oh thus, what a powerful blood! "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Oh, the condescending love of the Lord Jesus Christ to sinners! His love is greater than you and I will ever be able to understand. On the other hand, the precious love of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross is something which serves to melt the heart of the Church of the living God. It is something that causes them to be humbled. It is something that causes them to confess their own unworthiness. It is something that causes them to glory in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, as the Son of God who

became the Son of man for sinners who knew not what they did.

Now congregation, do not think that those who crucified the Lord Jesus were temporarily insane, as many plead today, there was no temporary insanity among these murderers. They knew they were crucifying a man. When the Lord Jesus said, "They know not what they do," He showed the ignorance of the enormity or greatness of their crime. They knew not that they had taken the very Son of God, and had cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him, his blood be upon us and our children." They were ignorant of His true identity. And yet there was every reason that they should have been fully conscious and aware that He was the Son of God. The Jews who held to the Old Testament laws, and held to the prophecies of the Messiah, should have known that this was the Messiah. My dear friend, you may be most ignorant of the truth, yet, you need forgiveness, and you are also without excuse. You are without excuse! If this blood is not found upon your heart on the great Day of Judgment, you will not be able to say, "The Lord did not save me."

The precious blood of Christ has been preached unto you, the sufficiency in this blood, but also His willingness to seek and save that which is lost. You have heard that He is able to save unto the uttermost, all that come unto God by Him. It is preached unto you, "Oh Israel (oh sinner), thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." It is preached unto you that there is help laid upon One that is mighty. It is preached unto you that it is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by His mercy He saved us.

Therefore, dear congregation, if the world would end today, this sermon would be enough to leave you without excuse. Ignorance is no excuse. Under Levitical law, if a person committed the sin of ignorance, we read, "If a soul commit a trespass and sin through ignorance in the holy things of the LORD; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering and he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 5:15-16).

Thus we see, on the one side, the sin of ignorance, and that presents hope in

Jesus' prayer, "...for they know not what they do.". It reveals that there is forgiveness with the Lord that He may be feared, as it says in Psalm 130. But at the same time it reveals that we have no excuse if we go lost. How do we know that? Paul, in Romans 2:1, says to the Jews, "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art. Thou art inexcusable! That's not your neighbor — that's you. That's not the person sitting next to you - that's you. This blood has a sufficiency in it, and this prayer has a power in it. This prayer will surely be answered for all those who are under the seal of election. This prayer will surely be wrought in the soul. The testimony of the Father and the Son, and the witness of the Holy Spirit, shall witness with our spirit that our sins are indeed forgiven. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." They were ignorant, yet without excuse. You are without excuse if you are still unconverted.

Congregation, there is one little word that yet needs our attention and it is the word in the Lord Jesus' prayer: "forgive." That word confronts us with our guilt. That word, congregation, confronts us with our condemnation. If there is the need for the prayer of the Lord Jesus for forgiveness, then it reveals that there is an offense. It reveals that there is a transgression. It reveals we have broken God's law. It reveals that, if we are not forgiven, we shall be forever, eternally and justly condemned.

Oh dear flock, forgiveness is something yet available this day. Forgiveness, as the Lord Jesus says, also reveals unto us from whom that forgiveness comes. Forgiveness also involves the application of the Holy Spirit, and when applied will show itself by fruits of holiness. We see sin put away by the Father, through the sacrifice of the Son. Congregation, this prayer is for transgressors. This prayer reveals Jesus' love for enemies and persecutors. This prayer shall not fail until the last one of His lost sheep is gathered in. This prayer will endure in its power. This prayer will endure in its sufficiency. This prayer will also show forth the love of a Triune God in the redemption of sinners.

I hope that as a flock we are all included in this prayer, because I cannot bear to see one on the last day who has heard this sermon, who has heard that there is blood enough and to spare, and then to stand there on the left side trying to make excuse. It shall be said unto you, as it was said unto Job, "You will not have one

answer for a thousand questions." Oh, you will not have one answer for the King of kings and Lord of lords. He yet comes with a treaty signed with His own blood, and presents it to you as sufficient. You will not be able to resist the command of Christ when He must say, "Bind this sinner hand and foot and cast him out, because he would not have me to rule over him." My dear friends, see the great danger of delaying your salvation! See the tragedy of rejecting the motive in the Father's heart from eternity, not because of anything in you and me, but because He was moved from within Himself to rescue lost sinners.

Oh congregation, He also declares that He is more desirous to save than to destroy. He says, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon: (Isa. 55:6-7). Do you think that His Word will fail? This Word, my friend, is sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ, and it cannot fail with regard to its results. In this Word is the testimony of Jesus Christ Himself, that His blood cleanseth from all sin; even though Satan may say you have sinned too much, you are the vilest of all sinners, or you are worse than a Jerusalem sinner. This day you hear that Jesus' ministry from the cross establishes the words of Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Why can God say, "Come now"? Because the Father's Son has purchased forgiveness; the Father's Son has paid the debt for a guilty and hell-deserving sinner. Therefore, sinner, there is yet room! AMEN.

Pentecost: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Sermon for Pentecost Morning)

Dr. J.R. Beeke

- Psalter 424: 1-2
- Scripture: Acts 2:1-21
- Text: Acts 2:1-4
- Psalter 143
- Psalter 428:2
- Psalter 255

Dear congregation, we wish you and your loved ones a blessed Pentecost, a day in which the Holy Spirit may be poured out in your midst. How urgently we need His convicting, converting, and establishing work in our hearts!

Our text words today are Acts 2:1-4:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. With God's help, we wish to consider with you:

Pentecost: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

1. The Time When the Holy Spirit was Poured Out.
2. The Manner in which the Holy Spirit was Poured Out
3. The People in Whom the Holy Spirit was Poured Out

I repeat: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: The Time When, the Manner in which, and the People in Whom.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come." The word Pentecost literally means fifty. The number fifty points to fullness, to ripeness, to a time that is ready for something to happen. The meaning of the number fifty developed during the Old Testament dispensation in part from three different events. In the first place,

the number fifty points to the feasts of Israel. The second major annual feast commanded by the Lord was celebrated fifty days after Passover. There was an intimate relationship between that celebration and Passover fifty days earlier. The Passover time commemorated the angel passing by the houses of the Israelites in Egypt because their doors were sprinkled with blood. Fifty days later, at a second feast, the firstfruits of harvest had to be presented. Thus the second feast was a completion of the first. At the first feast some sheaves were presented, but at the second feast two baked loaves of bread were presented. As the law stipulated, these were waved before the Lord and Israel had to say, "Lord, Thine they are, and we received them from Thy hands." Thus this second Israelitish feast, the feast of harvest, was a feast that symbolized "completion." It was a feast of ingathering, of reaping, and of joy.

Now, in God's providence Jesus Christ waited to send His Holy Spirit until fifty days after His resurrection. His resurrection was already the firstfruits of the victory, but the actual ingathering of God's spiritual harvest still had to transpire. God chose fifty days later as the time to harvest the full fruits of His glorious gospel grace in the midst of the nations by gathering thousands unto salvation through the convicting and saving work of the Holy Spirit. Thus Pentecost is introduced to us with these words: "And when the day of Pentecost (the day of fifty) was fully come." In this day, when the time was ripe, God determined to gather in His harvest. He determined to enlarge the boundaries of the covenant of grace to make them international and universal. From all nations men were gathered and were savingly wrought upon.

My friends, we still live in the New Testament dispensation. God's harvesting work is still going on. God is still able to take your heart, your Gentile heart — for we are all Gentiles by blood — and bring it under the canopy of His internal, saving work. Boys and girls, young people, and adult friends: We need God's time to fully come in our individual lives. We need God to do His harvesting task in our hearts. We need God to gather us unto Himself. Are you praying for it, dear friends? Perhaps even this morning, as you came to God's house, was it your sigh, "Lord, there have been so many thousands converted on Pentecost almost two thousand years ago; can it be even on this Pentecost that Thou may yet gather me

— a corrupt, unworthy sinner"? Are there people sitting here this morning who must say, "Lord, I have so many fears about my soul for eternity, but oh, could it not be on Pentecost that Thou wouldst break through, that Thou wouldst finally harvest my soul? Oh, may the time fully come! May I hear Thy voice of mercy piercing my heart and feel the power of Thy saving Spirit convicting, making room for Christ, and doing all the glorious acts of salvation."

Pentecost, as we have said, means fifty. That fifty causes us to reflect back on the fifty days between the first and the second great feast, between Passover and Pentecost, but secondly, it also must cause us to reflect on the giving of God's law on Mount Sinai. The law was given fifty days after Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Here is a beautiful token of the graciousness of the law — that the law is not a covenant of works, but flows out of the covenant of grace. The law came for God's people as a gracious rule of gratitude because fifty days after Israel was delivered, the Lord came down with a mediator between Himself and Israel, so that Moses, as we read in Acts 7, might receive the law out of the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the law, though it is a convicting and condemning tool in its first usage, is in another usage, a rule of life for the delivered and grateful believer. Of this usage, Jeremiah states that God says, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." It is this usage of the law that caused David to say, "Oh, how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day." Those who are delivered from Egypt need sanctification. Those who are justified and escape from the power of a spiritual Pharaoh, of Satan, need the rule of God's law to assist them to walk in their King's highway of holiness. To be harvested, they must exhibit godliness in the fruits of their lives. They must walk out of gratitude according to the law. Thus this number fifty is also a symbolic number of spiritual fullness through holiness. It speaks of God not only working justification, but also of God gathering His people through sanctification to a godly life.

Thirdly, the number fifty reminds us not only of the feast days and of the giving of the law, but especially of the year of jubilee. When the fiftieth year arrived in Old Testament Israel, the command was given that all that had been lost had to be restored. Everything had to be returned to its original owner. If you lost something

by poverty or through bad debts, in the fiftieth year you would receive back what you originally possessed. It was a gracious act of God's law.

What a fit picture this is of the gospel! For you and I have lost everything in Paradise, including God Himself. In the fullness of time God comes back to an elect sinner. He gives back everything through Jesus Christ that the sinner has lost in the first Adam. God returns and graciously, freely, gives back everything. That is Pentecost - God returning everything in the fullness of His triune Being to a sinner who deserves nothing. The Father had returned already in Paradise to establish His covenant of grace by intercepting Adam and Eve, breaking their covenant with Satan. The Son returned in the fullness of time in Bethlehem and for thirty-three years walked on this earth. But now the Holy Ghost returned, so that the church may receive back a full God, a triune God of grace, and may have everything restored that she lost in Paradise. Thus Pentecost may well be called the feast of jubilee, the feast of God's completed return, the feast where God has let Himself be given away completely.

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come." You see now, do you not, the special timing of God? Do you now see why the disciples had to wait ten more days? Forty is the number of testing. They had to be tested for forty days between resurrection and ascension. But the time had to become ripe for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the Lord planned that timing with perfection. When the fiftieth day arrived, the day of Pentecost, the day of the feast, the day of the giving of the law, the day that symbolized the year of jubilee, when that whole Old Testament dispensation pointed to the ripeness of God's time, Christ sent His Holy Spirit.

My friends, God's timing is always best. We are always impatient, but God is patient. His timing is true and right. He knows what He is doing.

Dear children of God, just as He timed this feast day and all the feast days perfectly, so He knows how to time every event in your life. He knows exactly what you need, when you need it, why you need it, how you need it, and to what degree you need it. His timing is perfect.

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come." God waits for fullness, God waits for ripeness. God is wise. Even in natural life, if you eat a piece of fruit before it is ripe, it will not leave a good taste in your mouth. Something is wrong; the fruit is

not ripe. God waits for ripeness. The beautiful thing is that He who is God of the feast is the God who also works ripeness for His people. This thought alone can easily make a whole sermon. If you start expanding this thought, you see how God in all areas of life deals with His children by making room, by making ripeness, in order to give the feast days of His grace. He will make room for Christmas, for Good Friday, for Easter, for Ascension, but also for Pentecost.

The trouble with much of modern Christendom in our day — which is also a danger for us because our hearts are no different is that we are prone to apply feast days to ourselves before God's time is ripe. We are prone to eat fruit that is not ready to be eaten. We are prone to take things into our own hands that God has not yet provided.

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come," our text says, "they were all with one accord in one place." There is something special about these words — "all with one accord in one place." It means that there was no division among this missing, waiting people. How is that possible? How could one hundred twenty people be gathered together in the upper room, missing and waiting, and have no division? That is possible because they were waiting in expectation upon God. You can believe that if they had been waiting in expectation upon men, there would have been much division. There would have been many problems, troubles, talking about one another, comparing their experiences with one another, and asking one another if they thought this one or that one was a genuine disciple and a true waiter.

These one hundred twenty disciples were God-centered in their waiting. It is a great gift when the church is filled with God-centered people. God-centered people have a dampening influence on all talk about men and a dampening influence on division. And how do they do that? I cannot explain that to you fully, but it is in part by their walk, their example, and their priorities. They will not engage or indulge in frivolous talk about people. For example, if someone comes to them and wants to hinder the accord in a certain place, they will say with love to that person, "Come, let us go to the person you are complaining about," and that puts an end to the unedifying conversation.

That is, of course, the way everyone is called to act. None of us are called to

listen to talk about others. Gossip and Christianity do not mix anymore than do oil and water. You are never called to indulge in division. You are never called to break things down in the church. You are always called to deal in accord with the Matthew 18 principle: If you have anything against your brother, go to that brother in love. As a church body, we are called to love one another and to esteem every other person in our congregation higher than ourselves. We are called to dwell with one accord in this place of worship.

My dear flock, let us love one another. The fruit of the Spirit is love. Tradition tells us that when the apostle John was old, he was brought from a lengthy sickness back to the church of Ephesus where he had preached several years. There was division there also, because there is as a general rule some division where God builds His church. When John was carried onto the pulpit, tradition says that all he said to his former congregation was, "Little children, love one another." Support, build up, pray for, treat one another exactly the way you would want to be treated.

But there is something deeper in these words: "They were all with one accord in one place." In addition to having outward respect for each other, these believers possessed a deeper unity. They had a spiritual unity. Their expectation was on God. They were in one accord from the heart. They were waiting for the same Holy Spirit. They were praising and praying to the same triune God. This is the accord that we really need to pray for — the accord of the mind of the Spirit. I believe we do have, by grace, some of this in our midst, but we must pray for more.

While they were there, "suddenly," our text says, "there came a sound *from heaven* as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." What the Lord gives comes from heaven. It comes from heaven to earth. It comes from free, sovereign grace. It comes from the one-sided work of God.

Moreover, what the Lord does from heaven, those who are destined to receive shall hear. There is "*a sound*" from heaven. Their deaf ears shall be unstopped. They shall receive ears to hear the Word of the Lord. They shall receive ears to hear what God has done and is doing. They shall receive ears to hear what sin is, what truth is, what grace is, and what Christ is. When the Lord begins, then many times - most of the time - it is not long before the sinner says, "Is this really what our church believes, what the Bible says what I am hearing? It is as if I never heard

the law before, as if I never heard the gospel before, as if I never heard about the beauty of Christ or about the heinousness of sin. It all seems new." And why? Because that sinner never had ears to hear before. When he picks up the Bible or the writings of our forefathers, he is amazed at what he reads, and says, "I never heard these sounds before." And why not? Because now the sounds are coming from heaven. Now they are not coming from the page, so to speak, but from heaven through the page to the heart, through the preaching to the heart, through prayer to the heart, through the means of grace to the heart. There was a rushing mighty wind, a sound from heaven that filled the house where they were sitting.

That sound came *suddenly*, our text says. God is often a surprising God. Sometimes He works more gradually. But many times also He works very suddenly. Indeed, where He comes even gradually, there still will be times when the heart is broken down and then the sinner will say, "It was sudden." "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven." Sometimes a person dies very suddenly and everyone is shocked. Sometimes a person's death comes very gradually, and yet, if you speak to the relatives when that person dies, most of the time you will hear them still say, "It was so sudden. We knew it was coming and we were expecting it on one side, but when it actually came, it came in a moment."

That is the way God works. Sometimes very suddenly an entire life is turned around -- like these three thousand and everyone is surprised. At other times He is working very gradually in someone's heart and everyone can see it except that person himself. Finally, when the Lord grants some spiritual freedom, that person says that He came so suddenly, while everyone else says, "It has been obvious that the Lord has been working there for years already." Whatever the case may be, when it comes to the sinner, he feels the sudden power of the sound from heaven. He feels God pierce his heart.

Scripture compares this awakening to the sound of a rushing mighty wind, and to "cloven tongues like as of fire." What do wind and fire do? Wind and fire do two things. First of all, wind and fire destroy. A wind can be very strong, Boys and girls, you have heard about hurricanes and tornadoes, and you know how strong wind can be. Wind can blow us over; wind can uproot a tree and cast it far away; wind can take a house right off its foundation. And we all know what fire can do.

A fire can destroy a whole house in a few minutes.

The Holy Spirit, the Bible says, is like wind and fire. In fact, the word "spirit" in the original language means wind or breath — the breath of God, the power of God. The Holy Spirit is a Person, but also as a divine Person He is the power and breath, the wind of God, to do the work of God. Where there is no wind, everything remains stagnant. But when this wind comes, the power of God destroys the house of self-hope; it uproots all our self-righteousness and flattens our trees of self-hope in a moment. The power of God strips us of all our righteousness, both our natural and our religious righteousness, and in God's holy sight it makes us lost sinners with everything uprooted. The Holy Spirit razes everything to the foundation; He casts everything down. The Holy Spirit is like a mighty, destructive, rushing wind.

My friends, do you know what it means to be made bare, to have the house of your hopes, the tree of your planting, flattened, and that you yourself have lain prostrate before the Lord? There are times and places where God's people, sometimes even literally, have been so flattened in all their hopes that they do not even go on their knees, but just cast their whole body on the ground out of dire urgency and prostrate themselves before the Lord. They groan and cry with wrestlings that are unutterable for the forgiveness of their sin — out of a holy complaint over their grievous woes and their iniquities, their backslidings and their indifference, and the foolish, filthy raggedness of all their righteousnesses. Oh, when the hellish mess inside becomes true, then they become prostrate before the Lord of hosts and cry out, "Oh God, take me out of the battle, for I am sore wounded!" That is the wind, that is the power of the Spirit, that is this pentecostal spirit convicting of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, making them bare before God Almighty. They become nothing but a sinner, nothing but a lump of destruction, nothing but a fit object for reprobation, condemnable and rejectable, full of trespasses and sins, yes, dead in trespasses and sins. Oh my friends, there are no words to express our misery! How profound this wind and fire are! They take from a sinner everything he thought he had. Do you know this painful work? Have you become lost, undone, guilty?

But the wind also heals and the fire also purifies. Wind and fire destroy, but

wind and fire also build up. We will consider that after we sing first from Psalter 428:2.

The Spirit's work is invisible, like wind. It is mysterious, like wind. It is sovereign, like wind. A tornado can wipe out one house and leave the next one standing. It is free, like wind. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Boys and girls, you can feel the wind, but you cannot see it. You can see what the wind does, but you cannot see the wind itself. That is just like the Holy Spirit. We cannot see Him, but we can see what He does. He makes a sinner poor and , needy. He makes him feel the stench, the sin, and the depravity of his own heart. The Holy Spirit brings everything to a total loss from our side. Sometimes people ask, "How deeply does a person experience his sin and misery before he has freedom to embrace Christ by faith?" Well, generally speaking, the Holy Spirit takes a sinner and leads him to write across everything of self, "Undone, unclean! Everything is a total loss, I have no righteousness." Though the sinner may have glimpses of Christ through the lattice of His Word prior to this, normally he will not be enabled to embrace Christ by faith as His own Savior until self-righteousness is in ruins.

But then the wind does a second thing. Not so long ago there was an old castle in England in which a basement was discovered that had been totally locked up for many years. No wind could get to it. A keeper of that castle went down into the basement and described the stench of that basement. It was unbelievable. He had to find a way to bring in wind to purify and to cleanse it. In a similar way the wind takes a destroyed sinner who says, "I am a total loss," and it blows with gospel graces, blows with the grace of Jesus Christ, so that this total destruction may turn into a garden and that the spices of God's grace may flow out. "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." The wind softly, gently, and sometimes powerfully, blows on the hearts of God's people, takes that self-destroyed sinner and shows him there is a way in Jesus Christ. The great task of the Spirit is to convict and strip in order to take the things of Christ and show them to the sinner.

Thus this wind works a purifying and a healing, so sinners see that everything

they miss and everything that is a stench and everything that is sin — which is everything — Jesus Christ has come to undo. So Jesus Christ "re-does" what the first Adam has undone. He "re-does" it all. They cannot obey the law; He has obeyed the law perfectly. They cannot bear the curse of God's wrath; He is their Curse-bearer. They cannot satisfy God's justice; He satisfied God's justice. They cannot pay for the punishment of their sins; He paid for the punishment of the sins of His people. They cannot pray rightly; He lives at the right hand of the Father to intercede for them. When the purifying wind comes along, they begin to see that everything is in Christ. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit is twofold: to uncover my unrighteousness and to discover the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Both usually happen gradually, step by step. But oh, how beautiful is this wind that fills the whole house! It fills the whole heart. It fills the believer. It makes him long more and more to know Christ. Oh my friends, if we smell the stench and taste the destructive power of our righteousness, then the beauty of the righteousness of Jesus Christ shall be so great that we shall say, when we have received the purifying, refreshing wind, "Oh, come, blow upon my garden all the days of my life, that I may know more and more of Him who is altogether lovely, who is the chief among ten thousand, who is white and ruddy." Blessed Holy Spirit who reveals the blessed Christ! And so the soul grows up in grace to know the winds of the gospel, to know the still, small voice of the gospel, to hear the message that there is salvation in Jesus Christ for a Manasseh, for a Philippian jailor, for a Bartimaeus, for those who have lost everything...

A fire does the same thing; it destroys, but it also purifies. Thus when cloven tongues of fire sat upon the apostles, this too was a symbol of the Holy Spirit taking away what they had and giving what God would give unto them, filling their hearts, filling their mouths, filling their houses with the Holy Ghost. A fire destroys. Boys and girls, we all know what a fire can do. But a fire can also heal and purify. Job said as it were, "When he hath tried me in the furnace of his affliction, I shall come forth as gold." Abraham saw the burning lamp and his life was spared. Moses stood before a burning bush and his life was spared. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked in the fiery furnace. Oh my friends, when the fourth One is there who is the first One, when Jesus Christ is there, then the fiery

trials He sends are means of purification, means of warming and enlightening, and not means of destruction. Yes, He destroys self-help and self-hope, but He builds up through the warming influences of His grace, so the sinner who has his building destroyed by the fire of God's wrath may sit by the hearth of the grace of God in Jesus Christ and see the fire of His tender mercy, purifying, warming, melting, moving his soul. The fruit of that is that he may say in his heart with the men of Emmaus, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us by the way?"

Oh my friends, did your heart ever burn within you with the burning, purifying, warming power of the grace of God in Jesus Christ? Did you ever sense His indwelling power? Was there ever a moment of Pentecost, even if you could not say you knew Him as a Person, that you could still say, "I know something of His work. I have felt His influence; I have felt His power breaking me down; I have felt Him also building me up in Jesus Christ. I know this wind and this fire"?

God comes to do this in poor sinners. He came to fill a hundred and twenty at Pentecost with the Holy Ghost. This wind and this fire were symbols of the Holy Ghost, but they were not only filled with the symbols; they were filled with the essence, filled with the Holy Ghost *Himself*. That is the essence of Pentecost. What does that mean? It means in the first place that they were filled 'with the *blessings* of the Holy Ghost, with the mighty wind of the Spirit, with the purging fire of the Spirit, with the heavenly dew of the Spirit, with the sacred oil of the Spirit. They were filled with the blessings of justification and sanctification.

In the second place it means that they were filled with the *fruits* of the Spirit -- those we read about in Galatians 5 — love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

Thirdly, it means too that they were filled with the *special gifts* of the Holy Spirit. They "began to speak," says our text, "with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The word "utterance" in Greek means clarity, accuracy. They spoke perfectly in strange tongues. The matters were given in their hearts and the language in their mouths. It was a miracle.

They were filled with the blessings, the gifts, the fruits of the Spirit, but also, fourthly, with the *work* of the Spirit; that work we have been speaking about — stripping the sinner down, bringing him to Christ, showing him the things of the

Savior. They were filled with experiential misery, experiential deliverance, and experiential gratitude.

Fifthly, and above all, they were filled with the *Person* of the Holy Ghost Himself. They were filled with Lord's Day 20: He is given to me to comfort me and to abide with me forever. In other words, they received more here than applied benefits; they received more here than a revelation of Christ. They were allowed here not only to appropriate and embrace Christ by faith, but much more than that. They were even allowed to do more than to have Immanuel in their arms and to embrace their Savior. They were even allowed to do more than have access to the Father, to see their adoption, and to be able to cry out, "Abba, Father," in the presence of God. For here they also received the Holy Ghost, the true Pentecost, the third Person, as their seal and their Sealer. They were filled with the Holy Ghost. They were allowed to embrace a triune God. They were not only reconciled to God, but now they were restored into a full knowledge of His personhood, full in the sense that they knew each person. The fullness of the triune Being is never exhausted, not even to eternity, but in that fullness they were sealed into the divine household as children of God. They were sealed with the seal of the Spirit who seals Christ within them and of whom John says in John 6:27, "Him hath God the Father sealed." Thus they experienced a triune seal — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They were sealed not only *by* but *with* the Holy Spirit. The Spirit Himself became their Sealer.

Now they experienced what Jesus said. "If the Spirit shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." My friends, this is an advanced step in grace. But the disciples here received what it means not only to rest in the mediatorial heart of God the Son, and the father heart of God the Father, but also the sealing heart of God the Holy Ghost. "Filled with the Holy Ghost." Oh, they could rejoice because Christ went to heaven as their Intercessor and their Advocate, but they now could also rejoice because they had an Intercessor and an Advocate in their own hearts. To know comfort is one thing, but to know the Comforter is another, I have told the boys and girls in chapel that if they went back to their classrooms and saw something on their desks — some work of someone whom they did not know — they could admire the work, but they would not know the person who had put the

work there. Something would still be missing. Likewise, when we may know the work of the Holy Spirit, that is wonderful and that is what we need. It is all that many of God's people shall know all their lifetime, but still something is missing. Shall we have that full ripeness, shall we have, full Pentecost, we need to know the triune God. We need to know also the Worker, the Promiser, the Fulfiller, the Sealer, the Comforter, the internal Friend, the Indweller — the Holy Ghost.

Only then, when we know the Holy Spirit, shall we rest in the triune rest wherewith God rests in His own triune Being. For we read in Zephaniah, "He rests in his love." Only when the sinner may come to know Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, can he find an abiding rest in the love of a triune God. In the steps of grace which lead to that, there are moments of rest and there are periods of rest, but only then when we may learn to know a triune God is there an abiding sense of rest in the Trinitarian boundaries wherewith God has bound Himself to rest within Himself. Only then may the sinner be set inside of those boundaries and see that he is bound in, hemmed in, by the love and the rest of God who rests upon His own electing work, His own redeeming work, His own sanctifying work.

They were filled with the Holy Ghost. They were, if I may say it that way, swallowed up with the love of God. They lost themselves in God. They could experience in those moments something of what Paul said as it were, "Whether in the body or out of the body, I can hardly tell, but this I know: It was as if I were in the very heavens, filled with the love of God, filled with the Holy Ghost."

Oh my friends, if still today the Lord comes to one of His children and leads him in these steps of grace, then when he may come to feel the indwelling power of the Holy Ghost, that power is so strong and that presence is so real and the Comforter is so true. When he feels the Holy Ghost, he may at the same time believe that all things are his, that he belongs to Christ, and that Christ belongs to God. Then he may cry out from the bottom of his heart, "It is Pentecost! — Pentecost, through the sealing Spirit. Christ is my Elder Brother. God is my Father."

Dear children of God, there is so much more to know and to learn of God than we yet know. May you become jealous of Pentecost realized experientially. May your longing be to know these more advanced steps of grace whereby you may know not only the work of the triune God, but also His Persons — as a friend

knows a friend — to know Christ as Elder Brother, God as Father, and the Holy Spirit as Pentecost Sealer.

Is not the world poor in comparison to this? Seek more to be filled with God and with His work. May it be your prayer, dear friends — young and old — “Lord, teach me first to know the destructive wind in order to know the purifying, cleansing wind, but also teach me to know that process again and again in my life.” Even after justification? “Yes, all the days of my life.” In the process of sanctification we need constant, strong, destructive winds. Paul said, “I die daily.” We need to die to live. Out of dying comes life. That is the example Jesus used of the seed cast into the ground. It had to die to live. A sinner has to die to live. Joseph Irons once wrote, “To live under the habitual anointings of the Holy Spirit, we must be dying daily to the world and following hard after God.”

Is that your life — dying daily to the world and following hard after God? That is a pentecostal lifestyle. It is not the speaking in tongues; those things have been abolished with the first generation, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians. Away then with the mystical pentecostalism of our day. But seek the pentecostal anointings of habitual, daily, dying to self, in order to be raised to live and to follow hard after God. Amen.

Daniel's Separation From the World

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

- Psalter 351
- Read Daniel 1
- Psalter 325
- Psalter 69:1, 2, 6
- Pealter 429:4

Our text-words you can find in Daniel 1, verses 8, 14, and 21: "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.... So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.... And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus...."

With God's help we wish to consider *Daniel's Separation from the World* in the following three thoughts:

1. How to resist temptation
2. How to go through trial
3. How to live

I repeat: *Daniel's Separation from the World*, first, how to resist temptation; second, how to go through trial; third, how to live.

I. How to Resist Temptation

Dear congregation, perhaps you've heard the expression many times, "Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone. Most of the time when we hear this, we think of Daniel in the lions' den, But "dare to be a Daniel" also applies to the first chapter of the book of Daniel, which is too often "a forgotten chapter." Today I want to consider with you Daniel in Daniel 1.

As the book of Daniel opens, we meet Daniel in the college of Babylon. He was probably only fifteen years old. He and three of his Israelitish friends were forced to go to a college in a city where they had no desire to be. They were carried away

captive by Nebuchadnezzar to the large city and college of Babylon, far from home and the temple where they had worshipped God.

Babylon was a worldly city full of temptations. It was the capital of the vast kingdom over which Nebuchadnezzar was reigning. It was a city with walls as high as towers and so thick that four chariots could safely ride abreast on top of them. Inside, all was luxury. It was the richest city in the world. Hanging gardens, supported by pillars, were sprinkled throughout Babylon.

Babylon was filled with pride, lust, and sin. Daniel and his friends were brought to the two most magnificent buildings in the very heart of Babylon — the king's palace and the temple of "Bel," the supreme god of Babylon.

No doubt the Babylonian college was particularly full of temptations. Immediately Daniel was confronted with a whole new way of life. According to the king's commandments, courtiers were appointed to train these young men (as well as other young men from a variety of conquered countries) so that after three years all the captives were supposed to be true Babylonians — both outwardly in behavior and inwardly in heart.

Everything had to change to meet the goal and demands of the proud Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and his friends had to learn the language of Babylon. Only Babylonian clothing could be worn. Their names had to be changed. Instead of being named after the God of Israel they were named after the gods of Babylon. Daniel, which means, "God is my judge," was changed to Belteshazzar: "keeper of the hid treasures of Bel." Hananiah, the grace of God," was changed to Shadrach: "inspiration of the sun" — which they also worshipped as a god. Mishael, "the Lord is a strong God," became Meshach — "devoted to the goddess Shach," the goddess of their feasts. Azariah, meaning "the Lord is a help," was given the name Abednego — servant of Nebo," the god of fire.

Their food and drink were changed. No longer could they eat their simple Jewish diet, but now rich foods and wine, both of which had been previously consecrated to idols through the performing of sacrificial rites, were placed before them.

They were instructed in Babylonian education which was filled with

heathenism. Babylonian literature, sciences, music, superstition, astrology, soothsaying, sorcery, and religion were the classes" they had to take.

After three years of thorough indoctrination Daniel and his friends were to appear before the king as true Babylonians, having forgotten their former life, morals, education, and especially, *the God of Israel*.

Today we would call this "brainwashing," especially when you consider that Daniel could have almost anything a natural heart could want. He and his friends could live like princes. Nebuchadnezzar would spoil them into forgetfulness of their past and into allegiance to himself.

Dear friends, is the situation really any different today in the world? Babylon rightly became a symbol of the "world." Perhaps the world today does not tempt you in precisely the same way, but are not its current temptations, albeit somewhat less direct, just as powerful as in Daniel's day?

Consider worldly *language*. Is not this Babylonian world full of it? Profanity abounds. Secular humanism is even more commonly revealed in the speech of millions. Of the billions of words spoken every day, how many do you think honor God? Of the words that proceed from your mouth is there one word a day that glorifies God?

Are matters better with *clothing*? Let us be honest — much immodest, Babylonian clothing is worn nearly everywhere in society today. Our clothing conveys a message. What message are you conveying?

With *food and drink* some of us fare no better. Many eat like heathen, refusing to acknowledge God as the giver of all that we receive. Are we among them — or else, do we quickly say a prayer without concentrating upon the great God whom we are acknowledging?

"Babylon" is alive and prosperous today — also in its *education*. All around us today we are taught either that God does not exist at all or an attempt is made to portray Him as a God who loves everyone. Devil- and spirit-worship abound around the world. In fact, the devil has his visible classroom in many homes through television. He uses TV as an effective tool to teach principles contrary to the ten commandments hundreds of times every day. He uses radio, newspapers,

magazines, books, movies — all to educate our minds in worldly, unbiblical ways.

Babylon is still here. The temptations are great and many, especially for young people. The pride of life, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye increase ten times faster than inflation.

And we are all guilty. We are in grave danger of being overcome by the flood of worldliness that sweeps over us and lives within us. Dear friend, has worldliness ever become sin for you? Do you realize how deeply you are prone to drink in its philosophy and its sins? Do you feel its dangers? Are you afraid of your own worldly hearts?

“Yes”, perhaps you will say, but did not Daniel have to go along with it? It was not his choice he was in Babylon, was it? After all, was he not in the land of the enemy, and is it not true, 'when in Rome we must do as the Romans? If he objected, the king would not hesitate to take his life — surely then he had better compromise somewhat, hadn't he? Otherwise he would lose his honorable position and perhaps even his life. And besides, aren't such things as clothing, food, names, and language rather small things to protest about?"

This was precisely Daniel's temptation. It is still our temptation today. Many go right along with the world while professing to be Christians. They attend church faithfully, pray and read the Bible regularly, For the rest, however, they think and act as the world thinks and acts, not wanting to be viewed as being different."

Young people, you understand this kind of peer pressure, don't you? When in school or at work, do you easily go along with "the crowd" or do you pray for strength to reject sin? Mixing Christianity and worldliness, Babylon and Jerusalem, keeping a form of religion but doing away with a separated and godly lifestyle — this is your temptation every day.

Part of this temptation is a mixed lifestyle which appears to make daily living so much easier. Little self-denial is needed. It is a lifestyle that can always be positive, can always say "yes"—"yes" to the church, "yes" to the world. How few realize that they are then saying "no" to God! God will not have a mixed, half-hearted people.

Dear young friends, what is your life? Is your talk Babylonian? Are you

worshipping worldly idols — the idol of entertainment, of riches, of ease, yes, of sinful self? Are you leading a life of "compromise"?

Compromise — that is one of Satan's favorite words when sin is involved. He likes to take us one step at a time down the slippery slope of iniquity. Gradually he aims to lead us into what has been rightly called "practical atheism"-- that is, living as if there were no God.

The first step down this slippery slope begins with abandoning secret prayer. Then the Bible is increasingly neglected. Searching of the Scriptures stops. We reason, "There are more things to do — I am so busy. Besides, we can't always be so strict — I would not care to have others see me so. It is wrong to be righteous overmuch,' I won't let happen what Jesus said must happen: "The world must hate you.' After all, don't I have to be kind to everyone?"

Such are Satan's reasonings and devices. More and more conscience is overstepped. Compromise. Babylon. Worldliness. It is a never-ending cycle. Eventually, the slippery slope may lead to a whole variety of sins — perhaps even drugs. And all the while, Satan is whispering, "Try it — how do you know what it is like unless you eat with the Babylonians and share their food? You will soon be used to it. It is not so bad. Experiment! You're old enough."

What a seemingly easy life Daniel could have had if he had only been willing to compromise! He could still have kept his own religion privately, couldn't he? All he had to do was go along with these customs and not take them so seriously. Are you such a compromiser?

By grace, however, Daniel could not compromise. The fear of the Lord was planted in his young heart. He could not be at home in the world. He could do no different than to say "no."

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." Here lies the secret: "Daniel purposed *in his heart*." Not because of parents, church, or any person, but because it was the desire of his heart. It was not legalism. It was not fear of God's punishment. It was out of love for the Lord who is so worthy to be feared that "Daniel purposed in his heart" to say "no" to the world.

Daniel desired to walk before the Lord, to live to His honor and glory. He knew from experience: "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Young people, can you say from the heart that you agree with Daniel? Do you dare to be a Daniel, dare to flee the world, dare to stand alone? Is the divine pressure of God's Word more weighty for you than the peer pressure of your friends?

There is still another reason "Daniel purposed in his heart" not to defile himself — *jealousy*. He was jealous for the Lord's Name, so he would not eat what was offered in the name of other gods, But he was also jealous over his own heart. He knew the power of temptation, of the world, and of Satan. He knew his own heart. He knew how quickly his conscience could be dulled, how soon secret prayer could suffer, how quickly communion with God could be broken. Therefore Daniel purposed in his heart."

By grace Daniel was more afraid of the snares of the devil and the pollutions of sin than of losing his own life. He would rather die than sin. That is not legalism. That is not being "righteous overmuch." Rather, that is love, God-given love, returning to the God who gave it.

Daniel received the courage to say "no" to sin from his heart as a gracious fruit of the Lord Jesus Christ who purposed in His heart from eternity to say "no" to sin for His entire life on earth. He gave His heart and life to the death of the cross in behalf of His Daniels who were by nature enemies of God but were made to fear and love His Name. May the Lord make us jealous of such Daniels. We often purpose in our minds or conscience, but how different that is from proposing through faith in our hearts!

This is real life, real living, real purpose. "Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself." Let us pray for grace to reject the world's selfish lifestyles and to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness!

With such laudable, God-glorifying motives we would be quick to think, "The Lord will now hurry to make everything well for Daniel. Now everything will go easy for him."

But no. The trial was yet to come. Let's focus on this trial in our second thought.

II. How to Go Through Trial

Daniel received grace to persevere with his rejection of worldly Babylon and its food offered to idols. He did all in his power to resist the temptation himself. He did not say, "Now that I have purposed in my heart not to eat with the Babylonians, I shall sit back and wait for the Lord to find a way to have me excused from their presence at mealtimes." Rather, he used means, praying that the Lord might bless them: "Therefore Daniel requested the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (v. 8b).

Daniel went to his superior, Ashpenaz, to request what he had purposed in his heart. He was not ashamed to confess his belief — not even to his employer. Can that also be said of us?

Dear friend, when you may say "no" to worldliness — even outwardly — you will experience at times in your life the Lord's favor upon your steadfastness. In Daniel's case, this can be seen already in the following verse: "Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs" (v. 9).

Did you read this verse carefully? *God* brought Daniel into favor — thus the Lord had already gone before him. He was already making things well. It seemed He was already paving the way for Daniel to live out his convictions,

No doubt Daniel himself had hoped his request would be quite easily granted. After all, "if God be for us who can be against us?" But Ashpenaz's answer is a grave disappointment: "And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king" (v. 10).

What a trial! What a mystery! Had not Daniel's request been a matter of prayer? Had it not been motivated by a sincere and earnest desire to avoid sin? Had not God Himself helped Daniel quite pointedly by bringing him into favor with Ashpenaz? And now the answer was "no"!

Daniel's "no" to the spirit of the world received a "no" from the Lord who had seemed to say "yes" before. What now? Must he give up? Must he give in? Our fleshly nature would be prone to say: "Now I can fully indulge; otherwise God

would have changed the mind of the prince. I must have been too strict, too religious, too narrow-minded, too intolerant."

Do you not think that Satan was also active in planting seeds of doubt within Daniel? "Daniel, it was all only pride — religious pride, stubbornness, and legalism. The Lord was not in it. It was only you. You are in Babylon now. Here the God of Israel won't answer your prayers. Here you must compromise with the gods and customs of Babylon."

Are you acquainted with such inner wrestlings of soul? You can believe that Daniel, the young man of prayer, was brought back to prayer through such a disappointment! Do you know times when God's mysterious providences and afflictions sweep over you, such that your soul cries out with him, "Lord, why? Oh God, did I not beg of Thee not to let me go my own way? Now what must I do? Lord, show me Thy will before I succumb to the snares of unbelief."

Do you know something of being driven back to prayer — time and again? You cannot be there too much. Usually, we are far too little in prayer. And when we do pray, how seldom we are brought to truly pray in our prayers!

I believe that there on his knees, looking and praying toward Jerusalem, Daniel received insight from the Lord to know what to do. The Lord directed him to try again — only this time he had to go to the prince's subordinate, Melzar.

"Then said Daniel to Melzar,...prove thy servants I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants" (vv. 11-13).

The first time it was Daniel's plan. This time it was the Lord's. Therefore he received courage to ask for a miraculous ten-day plan in which his life could be at stake if a difference were not to be seen on these four young men after eating common vegetable food for ten days. "As thou seest" after ten days, "deal with thy servants."

"So he consented to them in this matter" (v. 14a). The Lord showed His favor and power in prospering this plan.

Melzar consented! No doubt Daniel was so glad at that moment with what the

Lord had done that he forgot about the ten-day trial he was entering. "And he proved them ten days" (v. 14b).

Now the trial began in earnest. A trial of waiting. What would happen? Would the Lord fulfill His promise? Would He be true to His own Word? Would they all be killed if they did not appear more healthy than the others after ten days?

A ten-day, waiting trial. God's people often experience "waiting trials." Waiting times can become double trials for them when an unfulfilled promise of God is involved. Oh, to be waiting with a divine promise without seeing any signs of fulfillment - what a trial this can be! When God's promises are first received by faith, they are unspeakably precious, but a time can arrive — a time between promise and fulfillment — when these promises, reverently speaking, can be a source of more burden than joy.

Ten days. Ten is often used in Scripture as the number of God's perfect purpose. It is no accident that Daniel had to endure this trial for ten days — not nine or eleven. His "ten-day" trial here serves as a type of the "ten-day trials" that God's people often encounter in the pathway to heaven. When God reaches His perfect purposes with His people in their trials, then the trial is taken away, but not before! Sometimes that calls for trials of only minutes or hours; at other times, it means trials of years or even for the rest of their life. .

The Lord knows best. He makes no mistakes. His trials are always of perfect quality and quantity to serve His eternal and blessed purposes.

In these trials, Daniel and all of God's people must be brought to that blessed place where they must die to themselves and their own righteousness. Together with Daniel, we must come to that place in our trials where the Lord would be righteous and just if there would be no difference after ten days. At that place we confess, "Oh Lord, I am unworthy that Thou shouldst make a difference where there is no difference between myself and the worst of all the Babylonians in Satan's service!"

No doubt Daniel came to truly learn the meaning of his name during those ten days. Daniel means *God is my judge*. He had to learn that man think of Ashpenaz) and self could not be trusted. Hoping against hope, he cast himself and his trial

upon the Lord. The Lord was free to judge both his case and himself. The Lord could do with Daniel what he desired.

Dear friend, this dying to self, this surrender to God and His will, is both trying and sweet. There God's Daniels are cut off from everything of themselves. There all comes to a standstill, and nothing remains but to sigh, "Lord, remember me in Thy mercy; I am unworthy; if I perish, I perish, but then I will perish in prayer to Thee. I will not let Thee go."

How many times Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, were praying alone and together during those ten days I can't tell you. No doubt they often encouraged and admonished each other to persevere in the way of obedience no matter what Ashpeniaz, Melzar, or any courtier would say. But that too must be cut off — the Lord alone can help; the Lord alone is free and sovereign. In the end, the case was between the Lord and Daniel — yes, even Daniel had to fall out of it. It was between the Lord and His Son. It was the Lord's case.

"He *proved* them." Dear friends, I cannot express in human vocabulary everything contained in this simple yet profound word, *proved*. In the final analysis, the Lord Himself was the one being tried, for Daniel was His child and belonged to His family. .

The Lord shall never disappoint His Son nor His people. The Lord made the difference. "And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse" (vv. 15-16).

The Lord is faithful! Miraculously He caused a clear distinction in the physical beauty and strength of Daniel and his three friends by means of His special providence.

Spiritually, matters are no different. God's people have food to eat of which worldly people do not know or understand. Ten days of spiritual food will do much for the spiritual beauty and strength of God's people. Too often they are lean and unhealthy, and then have nothing to say. It is all their own fault.

But the Lord comes back. He is the faithful God who plants faith, gives strength to walk in faith, tries faith, and fulfills His own Word in 1 John 5:4, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Daniel's life was not easy, but it was blessed. Let us pray for that kind of life — especially you, young people. Pray for a life that remains separate from worldly influences not only in temptation, but also through trial. In trial it takes special grace not to return to the world, but to choose, like Moses, rather "to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." May the Lord grant this good choice to you out of free grace.

Never forget: The Lord does not promise His people an easy life, but He does promise them a blessed life. He shall fulfil Romans 8:28 for them throughout all their trials, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Oh, dear young friend, ask the Lord to come against your natural, fleshly inclinations, in order to teach you the great blessedness of His service! All that is worldly is vanity and temporary; all that is of the Lord is invaluable and shall endure forever.

"Happy is that people, that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD" (Psa. 144:15).

"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6).

APPLICATION

III. How to Live

We read in the closing verse of Daniel 1: "And Daniel *continued* even unto the first year of king Cyrus* (v. 21). The first year of King Cyrus was 539 B.C. - nearly seventy years after Daniel was first taken captive. For seventy years Daniel continued to live separately from Babylonian worldliness. Amid all the honor of his exalted position as the king's counsellor, Daniel *continued*. In spite of all the

jealousy toward a foreign captive in a coveted office, Daniel *continued*. Through the insanity of one king and the murder of three of his successors, Daniel continued.

Daniel continued. For seventy long years Daniel walked by faith in a foreign land, placed only below the king in authority. Through four earthly kings he continued to trust the King of kings - believing, obeying, and knowing that He who gave the commandment to remain separate would also supply the grace. "He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Ps, 55:22b).

Do you ever read once in the book of Daniel that this great prophet who dared to stand alone regretted his separate lifestyle? The answer is obvious: of course not. But the deeper question must then be asked: Are you, my friend, following his example by grace?

Sometimes when a person lives to be very old you read in the newspaper that he is asked the secret of reaching such an age. Most of the time a foolish, humanistic answer is given. I once read of a man who was asked on his 107th birthday if he ever thought about death.

"No," he replied, "I have a brother who became 120."

Such is the foolishness of man. How seldom we realize that every day of our life we are totally dependent on the longsuffering forbearance of God!

If you could have asked Daniel what the secret was of his becoming nearly ninety years old while still walking a God-fearing life in the midst of a heathen country, he would have had a much different answer. He would have said, "Grace. Free, sovereign grace."

You can read this answer between the lines in Daniel 9. More than fifteen times in this one chapter Daniel confesses his sins and unworthiness.

That Daniel *continued* a separate lifestyle was entirely due to grace. Grace is God's unmerited favor to unworthy sinners, granted for Christ's sake. Grace is:

God's

Riches

At
Christ's
Expense

Grace was Daniel's secret from beginning to end. *Preventing grace* kept him from falling into temptations, *accompanying grace* brought him safely and profitably through trials, and following grace pursued him all the days of his life (Ps. 23:6). For more than seventy years Daniel experienced God's comforting declaration to His children: "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9).

The gracious, eternal love of a Triune God — that was everything for Daniel. He tasted the drawing love of the Father who chose him from eternity. This eternal love enabled Jesus to say of His Father's chosen Daniels: "No one shall pluck them out of My Father's hand." But Daniel also experienced the sustaining love of the Son, who "ever liveth to make intercession for His people (Heb. 7:25). And he was intimately acquainted with the applying love of the eternal Spirit, who enables believers to sing by faith at times:

*Lord, though I walk 'mid troubles sore,
Thou wilt restore my faltering spirit;
Though angry foes my soul alarm,
Thy mighty arm will save and cheer it.
Yea, Thou wilt finish perfectly
What Thou for me hast undertaken;
May not Thy works, in mercy wrought,
E'er come to naught, or be forsaken.*

"And Daniel continued" — solely because of the Triune Jehovah. He is the great "I AM THAT I AM," who abides eternally the same. Therefore the burning bush which Moses saw was burned with fire but not consumed. As Father, the unchangeable Jehovah lit the burning bush of salvation already from eternity in the Counsel of Peace. The Son fulfilled all the requirements of salvation for the hell-worthy in time by obeying the law perfectly and by enduring the agonies of death — all the while burning with love for His Father and His people. And the Holy Spirit works savingly in the elect, thereby guaranteeing that there shall be a

living, burning, but not-consumed church even until the end of the world.

It was not Daniel, not his free will nor his good works, which enabled him to persevere in a God-fearing lifestyle. If God's people, as branches of the living Vine, would have had to be the fuel upon which the continuance of the flame depended, the living church would have been consumed long ago. The tender branches would have withered and died from the heat of God's wrath in a moment. But the Lord Jesus Christ took all the heat upon Himself — the heat of God's wrath, of hellish powers, and of the sins of His people — so that His church could be in the fire and not have a hair of their head singed. Christ walks with His people in the midst of all their burning, fiery furnaces.

In a word, Daniel continued with God because the Triune God continued with Daniel. His name is Jehovah. He is the Unchangeable One: "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).

I would say it even stronger: Daniel continued with God because God cannot but continue with His people, God's continuation with His people is inseparable from His Name, cause, and glory. God's people, God's church are precisely that — God's. Oh, what comfort lies in this for all God's persecuted Daniels! No matter how stoked the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar may be, and no matter how deep and closed the den of lions may become, the Lord maintains His church and people.

Not that this was always easy for Daniel to believe. No doubt there were times when Daniel cried to the Lord, "Shall I ever continue to the end with all these temptations surrounding me and within me? Oh Lord, I have forfeited everything — also that Thou wouldest continue with me — but Thou canst do it for Thy own Name's sake. Lord, continue with me, though I have made myself unworthy a thousand times."

"And Daniel continued" — it could not be any different. Not one child of God shall be lost.

God was good to Daniel so good, that he was spared to see better days when God's promises were fulfilled. When King Cyrus conquered Babylon, he allowed the people to return to Jerusalem. He allowed Daniel to see Israel's deliverance

from captivity before he died.

Young people, there are many lessons to learn from the first chapter of Daniel for all of us, but especially for you. Before we close this service, let me summarize a few of them for you:

(1) Ask for grace to live Daniel's kind of life, a life of separation from the world and in the fear of God. Perhaps you will respond: "But this would be so hard. My friends will despise me. I will be looked upon as old-fashioned and strange. I will be persecuted to no end."

That can all be. But remember, friends who seek to lead you into the world and away from God, are no friends at all. Actually, they are your enemies. And remember too, that the loudest mockers often have the deepest respect underneath. Often they will even show you their respect later — privately. "When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7).

(2) Ask for grace to have a higher regard for what the Lord thinks about you than for what people think of you. Daniel continued in honor with those from whom he had separated himself and in honor with God's people, but most importantly, he continued in the favor of the Lord. "In His favour is life" (Ps. 30:5).

(3) Ask for grace to be faithful, also in little things. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10).

(4) Ask for grace to be courageous, to stand firm for Biblical principles. Ask the Lord to give you what you need to dare to be a Daniel — to dare to stand alone. That is what the future of the church desperately needs also — Joshuas and Daniels who dare to say "no" to sin and "yes" to God.

(5) Ask the Lord to grant you friends who also dare to say "no"— friends like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When looking for a mate for life, do not look for one who always says "yes." Pray that God may guide you to a partner who has a deep respect for the truth, and yearns to know and walk in the fear of the Lord.

(6) Ask the Lord for a praying life. Bring all your needs to Him. You cannot come too often, nor stay too long at the throne of grace. The Lord says to you,

"Acknowledge Me in all thy ways and I shall direct thy paths." Pray above all for true conversion; do not rest short of a personal, saving acquaintance with Jesus Christ, the only Savior.

(7) Ask for grace to refrain from sin. Don't think you can remain standing in your own strength. Bow your knees every morning and pray: "Lord, give me what I need to avoid temptation as much as possible, but also to remain firm when in the midst of it."

(8) Like Daniel, avoid as much as possible those people, places, and customs which place temptation in your pathway. Instead of the attitude, "How far may I go and still not sin?," ask, "How may I stay as far as possible from sin?"

(9) Search the Word of God. Pray that the Lord might grant you David's precious testimony: "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee" (Ps. 119:11).

All of us, young or old, stand on one side or the other. We are ruled either by the childlike fear of God or by the slavish fear of man and self. Are you standing on Daniel's side? Is your life an example like Joseph in the house of Potiphar and Moses in the courts of Pharaoh? Do you know what it is by grace to fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12)? To "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3)? To put on "the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Eph. 6:13)?

Or are you pursuing a lifestyle of compromise with sin — a life of "halting between two opinions" (1 Ki. 18:21), of trying to give God half a heart? Are you trying to live a somewhat religious life while avoiding Christ's command, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" Mat. 16:24)?

Perhaps matters are even worse. Perhaps you are siding totally with the Babylonians. Do you never pick persecution and worldly loss above God's displeasure and a wounded conscience?

Do not forget: Both the compromisers and those who are altogether worldly are on the Babylonian side.

Dear friend, there is no third side — a half-and-half life is the devil's side, too.

On which side are you standing the side of Babylon or the side of Daniel? Daniel's side is the only life worth living. By the grace of God, it's how to live. AMEN.