

HOW GOD WORKS

IN A

DAY OF RUIN.

Unrevised Notes of Address
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(HAB. III. 17-19; ZEPH. III. 12; HAG. II. 18, 19;
ZECH. I. 8; MAL. III. 16-18.)

I SUPPOSE every person in this room is aware that we are not at the commencement of the period of the grace of God, but at the close. In the beginning God was pleased to work, the church was formed, and there was a very bright testimony set up here on this earth—the most wonderful testimony that ever had been set up, and we might say the most wonderful testimony that God Himself could set up, because this testimony was different in character from every other testimony that had been set up before. It was different in this way—the Spirit of God came to maintain it, so that it did not depend upon man in that sense in the least. All that man had to be conscious of was his entire weakness and dependence upon God, so that everything was supported in the power of the Spirit of God. But the fall of the church has been greater than that of any previous testimony that has ever been established upon earth. Now we are at the close when the fall is so manifest and corruption is increasing and spreading with the

greatest rapidity; the only bright outlook for us is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is no good for us to think things will get better. Things will get worse and worse. In such a state of things it is of the greatest importance for young and old to be quite clear as to how God works, because if we do not understand how God works in a day like the present, we shall be disappointed with what God is doing, and may perhaps be unhappy because we do not see what we think should be brought to pass. Now first remember that God works very differently at the close of a period from what He does at the beginning, and why He does this is because unfaithfulness has come in. Unfaithfulness characterises the mass, and God is bound to be true in His principles of government to the death of Christ, and therefore God works very differently indeed at the close of a period. Now I will just shew you how it was so in a previous period. You remember how the kingdom was established in David, and then the bright reign of Solomon, which closed with what was very sad. But still there were wonderful days in Solomon's reign, so wonderful indeed that the testimony of the wisdom of Solomon reached the Queen of Sheba, and she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of

Solomon. When the kingdom of God was established there was a wonderful testimony. There was visible power and glory, and at Pentecost there was a marvellous testimony. The testimony of the saints spread throughout the whole world, and in many ways you will remember in what a distinct and wonderful way God worked.

Now we have read passages from the books where the close is specially before us. In the New Testament when the Lord came it was at the close of those days, and there were just a few in the temple. There was nothing very great, nothing that the natural man would take any account of, and yet there was a distinct work of God. There was a little company maintained in spite of the corruption, and that little company was ready for the return of Christ. God is working to-day just on those same lines. I want to bring before you one or two points out of each of these books. It is very seldom I take up several books, because sometimes people have a difficulty in following. If we take the leading thought out of each of these books and put them together it will be for great help and profit, and you will be able to read them and get the detail for yourselves.

First of all in the book of Habakkuk what is prominent there is the government of God

—the governmental dealings of God with His people. The people of God had fallen, and if fallen, God must either give them up or deal with them. I will give just a simple word to make plain the thought of government. If a man has a family, the father maintains government in the house: he is bound to do so. We all know that boys are inclined to be naughty, and if government is not maintained the result is that the children will go to ruin. Just in the same way we have the government in a country. There is the government of God as well as the grace of God; the government of the *Lord* in connection with the church, the government of *God* in connection with the world, and the *Father's* rule in connection with the children of God. I just mention this so that the thought may be quite plain to the youngest. Now in the book of Habakkuk the great thought is the government of God. Things were so sad that God must come in and deal with His people. If you read the book you will find that God took up an instrument, and this instrument was really worse than the people who were punished. But God is sovereign and takes His own way about things, and in the end we shall be able to see the wonderful wisdom of God in every way that He took with His people. There is a

verse in the New Testament in connection with this principle (1 Peter iv. 17): "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" Why had the time come when judgment must begin at the house of God? Because the people of God had fallen, and the time had come when God must begin to judge them and correct them so as to produce exercise, so that those who were exercised might get great gain through the Lord dealing with them. Now in Habakkuk ii. you get the figure of a man watching in the tower to see if the enemy was coming. If God is dealing with His people I must be on the watch-tower. The principle that comes out is this—if I cannot see any sign of God coming in I will just simply rejoice in the Lord. That is a very important principle. Many people want to see something very great, and if they do not see something great they are very much discouraged. The great thing for us is what Habakkuk brings out in principle—if there is nothing at all visible yet you joy in the Lord because there is no change in Him. Habakkuk speaks of the fig tree not blossoming, yet he says: "I will rejoice in the Lord."

Now I will just apply this in a very

simple way. There are some of God's people who always think there should be some great revival going on, and if there is not they are unhappy, and they think things are all wrong. But the moment there is anything that the natural mind of man can take note of and speak approvingly of it ceases to be owned of God; and why? Because the hand of God in government is upon us to-day—on the whole of God's people, because the church has fallen, and God will only work consistently with the fact that His people as a whole have fallen, and He will never again work as He did in the early days at Pentecost. Hence the great importance that our joy should be in the *Lord*. Then notice one little word. He speaks of his feet being made like hinds' feet, that is, very sure-footed. If you want to be sure-footed to-day and really to be in God's path, your joy must not be in the *work* of the Lord, or in nice meetings, or because you have come in contact with nice Christians, but your joy must be in *the Lord*, and just as your joy is in the Lord, and as you are able to rejoice in the God of your salvation, so your feet will really be like hinds' feet, and you will know what it is to be in the enjoyment of your heavenly portion.

Now I want to draw your attention to a principle found in Haggai. In Haggai the

remnant had neglected God's house. They were thinking of their own houses and their own prosperity. God's interest had got a second place. That is a very important principle for us to be exercised about. What is your chief interest on earth? Is it your business? You are a disgrace to Christianity if it is. Is your chief interest your family? Then you are all wrong. The chief interest must be the house of God, and everything else must be second to God's interests. If God's people are going to be prosperous, they must be a people with one object. You will make no progress in divine things unless you have the house of God before you. Now I would like to apply it in this way. I was talking to some one last night and I referred to that verse in Philippians where it says, "All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's." I do not think it was their business, I do not think they were as low as that, but I think the difficulty was like this—there are some people who work specially on the line of the gospel, and others who work specially with the saints. Now suppose my work is in the gospel and I am only occupied with the gospel, then I have only the benefit of man before me. If my work is specially in the gospel I must see that I pray for the teachers, and if my work is amongst the saints, I should see that I am praying for

those who work in the gospel. The difficulty comes in when you get a class of people who say, "We are Sunday-school people," or "we are for the gospel," or "I am for the saints," because each one is looking on his own special little bit of service. After all, what is any little bit of service you and I can do? Only a little speck on the horizon. We should be occupied with what *God* is doing and not with what *we* are doing. Instead of looking on our little bit of service we should be looking on the great and vast extent of Christ's interests. That is what comes out in principle in the prophecy of Haggai. But if they made a mistake in looking on their own things, there was a moment when they laid the foundation of God's house, and God says—though there is no fruit, yet from the day that you laid the foundation I began to bless you. Do you want to enjoy the blessing of God? Do you want spiritual prosperity? You cannot have spiritual prosperity save as the house of God is before you. You must be a man with one thing before you, and that is the interest of God's house, and unless you have got God's interest before you, you will not get much blessing from God. Do not think that if you have the house of God before you, that you will cease to be evangelical; if you can help the saints a little bit, it is a privilege to be of

service to them. But we must have the interest of God's house before us and see that God gets His portion.

Now notice the verse we read in Zephaniah iii. 12. There you get what characterises the people of God in days such as we are speaking of. "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people." Just contrast that with the church at Laodicea, who say "we are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." That is Laodicea. Do you think *you* have got all the light? If you do you had better take care. The question is not what *light* you have but what *life* you have. Laodicea had plenty of light but no life. They boasted in their own eyes that they had plenty, but in the eyes of the Lord they had absolutely nothing. What is the mark of God's people to-day? An afflicted people. Perhaps we do not like people to look down upon us. But it would be a great mercy if we had more the marks of an afflicted and poor people. It is not a question of pounds, shillings and pence. It is on the line of being poor in spirit, and in a sense like what came out in the blessed Person of Christ. Not seeking anything great here, but just being humble, accepting a pathway that is consequent upon God dealing governmentally with His people.

A beautiful thought comes out in the verse

we read in Zephaniah iii. 12—"They shall trust in the Lord." They were a poor and afflicted people, but they had real confidence in the Lord and were characterised by trusting in Him. They did not turn to the things that were around them. They knew the Lord's heart in connection with His people, and they were just able to walk in simple confidence trusting in Him. They were maintained amidst all the sad state of things that was found in connection with the people of God.

Now just to sum up what we have gone over. First of all, in the book of Habakkuk it is the governmental dealings of the Lord with His people. In the prophecy of Zephaniah the point is—that in the midst of all the sad state of departure there would be an afflicted and poor people, but what would characterise them would be that they would not turn to man, or to the principles that characterise the natural man, but walk in simple trust in the Lord. In Haggai the great point is that the people had their own interest before them instead of God's house, but the moment they thought of God's side, and laid the foundation of God's house, the Lord said, "From this day will I bless you." Blessing comes the moment you begin to forget your side of things and really to have God before you. There may be no out-

ward sign, but from that moment God blesses you. God always responds to people the moment there is response to His own heart.

Now the prophecy of Zechariah is very interesting. I suppose we all know that the horses referred to are an allusion to the four great empires that are found in the book of Daniel (Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greece and Rome). But it does not matter actually as to that—there are four empires, that is enough. Zechariah does not present the empires exactly—he presents the empires in connection with the horses. A horse in scripture signifies a government. In each of these empires there was a certain amount of government from God; that is, God really gave the empire to Nebuchadnezzar, and then He gave it to the Medes and Persians, then He gave it to Alexander, and then to the Romans. In these empires there was a certain amount that was good and of God—“The powers that be are ordained of God.”

Now the book of Zechariah brings out a very important point and that is that God overrules and orders everything in connection with these empires—nothing really hinders His glory, and everything is in view of the blessing of His people. Now let me just enlarge on that, because it is a great encouragement. Here were ungodly people who were trying to wipe out the

people of God. That looked like ruination, but it was not ruination at all. God was dealing with His people through the Chaldeans, and was simply using them for an end so that there would be real blessing to His people. That is the great thought running through the book of Zechariah. God was using all these powers that appeared to be so against His people for their help and blessing, and for the glory of His own name. Then God opens up in this beautiful prophecy how He will forgive and cleanse His people and bring them finally into blessing under Christ. But the point to bear in mind is this—all the powers of the world that were against God's people and appeared to be for their destruction, God was overruling for their blessing and for the glory of His name.

Now when you come to Malachi you find a different state of things, and it is the worst state of all. There is one word that characterises Malachi and that is "corruption." There could not be a more awful state of things than that found in the book of Malachi, and there is no doubt that our day corresponds exactly to the book of Malachi. It is a terrible day for corruption. God would speak to His people, and He says, "You have robbed me." And what do they say? "Wherein have we robbed thee?" The people are so dull in their souls and under the

power of corruption that they say to God, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" I need not enlarge to-night upon the awful corruption that is around us. People even glory in it, and say the world is at its very best. If you read through the book of Malachi you see that everything that bore the name of the Lord upon the earth was corrupt, and that is the case to-day. The enemy is seeking to corrupt everything, and outwardly speaking everything is corrupt. Now in this day of corruption what do we find in connection with the true people of God? "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." No one can be for God in a day of corruption like the present unless he fears God. You may be very clever, have a wonderful brain, and take up the things of God in a wonderful way, but that will not enable you to be here for God. The man or woman who would be here for God to-day is the person that is characterised by the fear of God. What is the fear of God? I sometimes think we speak of these simple things and conclude people understand them, but they do not always. The fear of God is simply this: You act under the eye of God. The question in your mind is not how *man* looks at a thing, but how does *God* look at it? I remember some time ago in America, Mr. — and I got on a train with four or five others. There

was no station so we could not take tickets. When we got on the train the conductor came along and Mr. — put his hand in his pocket and paid for us all. After he had paid he said to me, "Just count this money, I think the man has made a mistake." I said, "He has given you a shilling too much." After a time the conductor came along again and Mr. — said, "Conductor, you did not give me the right change." "Why did not you tell me at the time?" said the conductor, "I can't make it up now." "You gave me too much." "Man," says the conductor, "why ever did not you put it in your pocket, no one would have known." "Oh," said Mr. —, "God would have known it." "Why," said the conductor, "I never met with any people who cared about God knowing." "But that is the whole point, conductor." "Dear me," said the conductor, "what a world this would be if people only cared about God knowing." That is really the fear of God. Now in these days people think nothing of God. "This change is not right; oh, well, it is his own fault." But that won't do. It is a question of the fear of God—how God looks at it. It does not matter whose eyes are upon you—God's eye is upon you. Am I walking in the consciousness that God's eye is upon me? The book of Malachi is in connection with religious things. If I am

characterised by the fear of God I shall depart from evil. If a thing is not according to God I must have nothing to do with it. The fear of God brings about separation. But what else? "they spake often one to another." The fear of God separates on the one hand, but on the other it brings the people of God together. Now do not let us make any mistake. It is the people that fear God, and only those that fear God whom God blesses. It matters not what is taking place in the government of this world, God has positive blessing for those that fear Him, and He is ordering things so as to help those that fear Him, and also to reach the consciences of others. Those that get the gain are those who fear the Lord. "They that feared the Lord *spake often one to another.*" They are not people who are content with going to a meeting every Sunday morning. I hope none of those one hour a week people are here. That is not enough for those that fear the Lord, because they are alive to what an awful scene of corruption they are in, and they want every opportunity to get together. Just as I was leaving New Zealand a man said to me, "How many meetings do you think I ought to go to." I said, "I can tell you how many meetings I like to go to. To start with, I would not like to be away from the Lord's day morning meeting, because I

never know whether I shall have another opportunity, and seeing the Lord says, 'this do in remembrance of me,' I would not be happy to be away. Next there is the prayer meeting. There is so much to pray about in this day of difficulty. Then again, it is so important to have the mind of the Lord, I do not see exactly how I could be away from the reading meeting. And then it is a very great privilege to proclaim the true character of the Saviour God, and if there is an opportunity of expressing a little fellowship with a man in this, I like to get there. If there are any other meetings, I like to get to as many as I can. But I do not see how I could be away from those mentioned." It says, "They that feared the Lord spake *often*." I hope none of you here think that the things of God are only for Sunday. The things of God are for Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Christianity is not something to be taken up for one hour, but for every hour, and that principle comes out in this scripture: "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another."

Now I must not go much further, but just notice the beautiful words that follow, "And the Lord hearkened, and heard." It is a precious thing to the Lord's eye to see a few of the people that fear Him getting together.

I do not think it is anything to the Lord's eye to see ten thousand people together who do not fear Him, though there might be the most beautiful singing, but that is nothing more than the machine in China to say twelve hundred prayers a day. What God values is something from the hearts of His people. Well now, if there are two or three that fear Him and get together, His eye is upon them. The Lord's ear is ever open to the righteous. He never takes His eye off the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. It says, "The Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written." It was all recorded. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." The principle that comes out in the last verse is important. "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked." By walking in the fear of God to-day you will be morally fitted for the office that you are to occupy in the kingdom in the day that is to come, and you will be able to discern what is of God and what is not.

Now on account of the state of God's people the Lord is bound to deal governmentally with them. There is a verse in the New Testament (1 Peter iv. 17), "For the

time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" God is dealing with His people to-day, the time has come for it. When Habakkuk saw that God was dealing with His people, he looked out, and when he saw that nothing outwardly was prospering, he said, "Yet will I rejoice in the Lord." Then you get your feet like hinds' feet—you will be sure-footed. You will be in the enjoyment of your portion. You will be able to sing His praise. The next prophet gives the mark that will characterise God's people—poor and afflicted—but they will trust in Him. They won't turn to human resources. If you are joying in Him you can trust Him. All power is in His hands. Just quietly go on in His way and trust in Him, and do not try to bring anything about except what He brings about. His way is the best.

The next thing to remember is that we must have God's house before us. When you get God's things before you and the interests of God's house, from that very moment God will bless you. Zechariah shews that every power in the world, though opposed to God's people, He is using for the help of His people and the glory of His name. God is at the back, and "the wrath of man will praise him." The close shews that there is terrible

corruption, and in a day of corruption “they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written.”

May God grant that each one of us may be characterised more by these marks—more by trusting Him, more by the fear of the Lord, and that we may be found more often together, and so encourage one another, and thus be more decided for Him in these closing days, so as to be to His praise and His glory.

