

The Servant's Justification

Witnessing for the Vindicated Saviour Jesus

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Let's begin by reading from Isaiah 50, beginning at verse 4.

The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary: he awakens morning by morning, he awakens my ear to hear as they that are taught. The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore have I not been confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifies me; who will contend with me? Let us stand up together: who is mine adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? Behold, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. Who is among you that fears the LORD, that obeys the voice of his servant? He that walks in darkness, and has no light, let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. (vv. 4–10)

Now let's turn to John's Gospel and begin reading at the start of chapter 16.

These things have I spoken unto you, that you should not be made to stumble. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour is coming, that whosoever kills you shall think that he offers service unto God. And these things they will do, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I spoken unto you, that when their hour is come, you may remember them, how that I told you. And these things I said not unto you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go unto him that sent me; and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have spoken these things unto you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you. And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you behold me no more; of judgement, because the prince of this world has been judged. (vv. 1–11)

Two further readings now from Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, beginning in chapter 3 and verse 14.

These things write I unto you, hoping to come unto you shortly; but if I tarry long, that you may know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of

the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; he who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory. (vv. 14–16)

And then some words from chapter 6 of this same letter, beginning in verse 11.

But you, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal, whereunto you were called, and did confess the good confession in the sight of many witnesses. I charge you in the sight of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession; that you keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in its own times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only has immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable; whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power eternal. Amen. (vv. 11–16)

And one final passage in 1 Corinthians 4, beginning in verse 1.

Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgement: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judges me is the Lord. Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise from God. (vv. 1–5)

And may the Lord give us good understanding of his word.

Tonight then we are to meditate, one with another, on the topic of 'the servant's justification'. So that we may get our terms straight, let us think first of all what justification, in this sense, does *not* mean.

Justification by faith

We are not going to consider that glorious, basic topic of how each one of us has been justified by faith before God. Though let us spend a second or two just revelling in it once more for the sheer delight of thinking about it. Justification by faith is that cardinal and basic doctrine of our faith, as a result of which the inspired apostle would tell us 'having therefore been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (see Rom 5:1). Oh, what magnificent words! Based simply upon our faith in God, but owing to the great and powerful sacrifice of our Lord, we can have both instantaneous and eternal peace with God. It is on this basis: having been *justified by faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we do not only have peace. Oh, how gloriously wealthy are we? We not only have peace, but we have access into this grace simply through faith, Paul says. And not only so, but

having access to it, we are not wobbling around: 'We *stand* in it,' says Paul, with great emphasis upon the word 'stand' (see v. 2). It is a firm ground of faith, a veritable rock of ages; and the standing we have in God, as the old theologians used to say, is one of one hundred percent *grace*. Glorious, isn't it? We have access 'into this grace in which we stand'. This is our *standing* before God as distinct (as the theologians used to say) from our *state*.

You tempt me to go on by the look on your face.

'And not only so, but we rejoice in hope of the glory of God' (see v. 2). It is not merely that we have been justified. It is not merely that we stand in grace; we are *confident*. We are, in that sense, *boasting*. It is not prideful boasting, of course, but true glorying in God. We may do it because the glorying is not in ourselves nor in our effort but in his superlative grace. And because we have been justified, and on those same grounds, we rejoice in hope (hope here meaning: 'certain expectation') of one day attaining the glory of God.

You would think that enough for any mortal shoulders to bear for one Sunday night, wouldn't you? But you can't stop God there! He has too many riches to dispense. Not only that, 'we rejoice in tribulation' also (see v. 3). Now, that one is quite a difficult one.

In my professional life, I had to *invigilate*, as they call it, many an exam. And for students, exams were tribulation. These exams were going to settle, perhaps, whether they got a first, a second, a third or an allowed pass and other such things too serious to mention. And perhaps their careers were going to be settled by these exams. It was a cruel sport, this invigilation business. One would arrive down at the examination hall and there would be perhaps one hundred or four hundred students gathering around, waiting to be let in. I tell you, they were far from rejoicing! Many a bitten fingernail and frown upon the brow and nervous laughter were to be observed. And then you would turn the key in the door and let them in, and they would settle at their desks and turn over the question paper. Now, until this point there were a few shafts of sunlight upon their brows. Oh, but there were lots of anxious looks when they actually saw what questions were there, because it was uncertain whether they would come through or not.

Do you know, if it were not certain how we would come through the tribulation, our brows would be knotted as well, wouldn't they? But oh, thank God! Listen to the glorious words: 'Having been justified by faith . . . we rejoice in tribulation: *knowing that . . .*'. We can know in advance, on the authority of God's word, that the effect of tribulation is to work endurance. The mark of genuine seed is that it brings forth fruit with endurance (see v. 3). And 'endurance works approvedness' and demonstrates that one is genuine (see v. 4).

Oh, my silver-haired brothers and sisters, whose hair is a bit more silvery than mine; you began by faith in Christ, didn't you? How many long years have you come through storm and wind and rain and sunshine, through prosperity and difficult circumstance? And you've proved the Lord; and the record behind you has shown your salvation genuine. You have a double ground for hope, haven't you? There is your faith in Christ and the fact that tribulation, with you, has produced approvedness—that this is the genuine thing. And approvedness gives grounds therefore to this second hope that 'does not make us ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts' (see v. 5). On that basis we can be sure that we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him. On that basis, we can be sure that we are saved and shall be saved by his life.

It is permitted to you to rejoice again before the Lord, in that you have been justified by faith. But it is not that of which I speak tonight; I want to talk about our justification as servants of the Lord, and that is another matter.

The justification of the Lord Jesus

I begin, not with us, but once more with our blessed Lord and one of the servant's songs, so-called, where he too talks about his being justified. Now, obviously our Lord was not like us in that he was never a sinner. He never stood condemned under God's holy law. He did not need justification in that sense. To suppose he did would border on the blasphemous. He never needed to be justified from the charge of guilt. He was sinless all his days. And yet, as you heard him talking through this messianic song, he expresses his confidence: 'He is near that justifies me' (Isa 50:8). What does he mean?

Isaiah 50 and the servant's justification

In Isaiah 50, he is talking as God's appointed and anointed servant, and tells us first in those lovely words of his morning watch: 'He awakens me morning by morning. He awakens my ear to hear as they that are taught.' And he says, 'You have given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary' (see v. 4).

My dear brother, my sister, how frequently has the blessed Lord Jesus done that for you? In the middle of your life, as father or mother of a family, or as an elder of a church, or a missionary on the field; how often have you known the blessed Lord Jesus come to you in your weariness, with words exactly fitted to your need and to ease the burden? And here is where (forgive me for using such terms) he learned the art. 'The words I speak unto you, I speak not of myself,' he said. 'I speak the words that my Father has given me' (see John 12:49–50). Again, in his prayer to his Father, explaining how it is his disciples have come to faith and continued in faith, he said, 'The words that you have given me I have given to them' (see 17:8). As the holy servant of God, we shall have thought he did not need to pray or to depend upon his Father. Could he not, of his own treasury, have brought forth words? But here he speaks: 'Morning by morning, *you* awaken my ear . . .'. These are the words that the Father gave him to speak. And we think in our imaginations of those times that Mark, for instance, records when, after a heavy's day work and a brief night's sleep, he went out into a desert part to pray (see 1:35).

Then he tells us that, God having opened his ear, he was 'not rebellious, nor turned away back' (see Isa 50:5). And why should he? Well, because of the opposition. He was met with fierce opposition here on earth, wasn't he? It was in the form of disgust and ridicule, with sarcasm interleaved, and positive denunciation and charges of blasphemy, and eventually charges of being of the very devil himself. And knowing the opposition, he says, 'I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting' (v. 6).

These remarks have often been referred to his sufferings at the cross, and doubtless they include it. They may more probably be metaphorical terms describing the fierce opposition that our blessed Lord faced as he taught the words of the Father to the crowd around him.

They are fierce metaphors, aren't they? He felt spitting and shame and positive beating and the hairs plucked from his cheek. Read again the Gospels and think what our blessed Lord endured. Think of the sarcasm of: 'This man has gone to be the guest of tax gatherers and prostitutes: that's him' (see Luke 7:34). It was a devilish suggestion. It was sin against the Holy Spirit that charged our blessed Lord in being in league with Beelzebub (see Matt 12:22-32).

We know where it all ended for Christ for his testimony as a servant of God. It ended in the high priest's court as they slapped him across the mouth for his testimony. It ended with the brutal, ignorant soldiers blindfolding him and saying, 'Tell us now who smote you across the cheek' (see Matt 26:68). It ended as he hung upon the cross, and the high priests went by in all their robes and mocked him over his trust in God: 'Ha! He trusted in God. Let him deliver him now if he will have him. Let him come down from the cross' (see 27:43). And he could have come down, couldn't he? But he couldn't disobey his Father, surely not. And he hung there, and it looked as if the charge had been proved. 'He is an imposter, and God himself will not have him.'

How should he be *justified*? It is not a question of his being a sinner and being saved by grace. That is out of the question completely and doesn't begin to be a question. It is how, when his faithful witness for God landed him on a cross with a charge, apparently proved, that he was an imposter, and God himself wouldn't have him. When they said, 'Let God have him if he delight in him,' there came no voice, and then came impenetrable darkness. He cried, out of his orphan soul: 'My God, why did you forsake me?' (see 27:46).

And now we come to the very holiest of holies, into the very heart and feelings and thoughts of the Messiah in those terrible hours. What sustained him in his testimony as a servant of God? He tells us: 'I was not rebellious. I set my face like a flint, because the Lord God will help me. Therefore I have not been confounded and I know that I shall not be ashamed' (see Isa 50:7).

What does he mean by not being ashamed? He doesn't mean, 'I know I shall never be caught out in the wrong things I did and my cheeks colour with shame.' Of course not, for he never did anything wrong. It is a question of the validity of his testimony for God. Will it all come to nothing, and he go down in history as an imposter and God came not to his relief? Will he suffer that kind of shame? 'No,' says the Messiah, 'let them do what they will. I know I shall not be confounded. I shall not be ashamed before men and angels, because, "he is near who *justifies* me"' (see v. 8). That is, 'justifies me' in the sense of 'vindicates me as the true servant of the Father, as the Son of God incarnate'.

And how did the justification happen? Our Lord himself tells us in the passage that we read in John 16, does he not?

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the servant's justification

We are told in the early verses of that chapter how our Lord, probably by this time within the shadows of Gethsemane, was telling his disciples that they must face a frightening future. They shall be persecuted; they shall be put out of the synagogues. The hour will come indeed, 'when whosoever kills you shall think that he offers service unto God' (see v. 2).

That must have been profoundly disturbing to the disciples, must it not? You think, my dear fellow believers who are going to a prospective missionary field, if the Lord stood by

your side now and said, 'You'll probably be put out of the synagogues, and some people will kill you.' But that isn't an impossibility, is it? You will have heard, as we all have, with profound shock, of our dear brother and his two sons who were burnt to death in India as they slept in their mobile caravan. And we have admired the courage of his wife. She is determined not to leave but to carry on her work for God, which has become a testimony to the whole of India.¹ We have to take the thing seriously.

You can imagine what the apostles would be feeling: 'If that's going to be our prospect, why does he go now? Why does he not stay with us and do some of his miracles to preserve us?'

But the answer is bigger than that. He was going, and for his justification there should come the Holy Spirit. He says,

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you. And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement. (vv. 7-8)

Now, I must go slowly over these verses, because far better theologians than I ever shall be (and I'm not a theologian at all), but I mean far better preachers and expositors, understand these verses in a slightly different way from what I would; and you must bear in mind the great possibility that they are right and I am wrong. They take these verses to be an exposition of the gospel, how that we are all sinners and, therefore, the Holy Spirit will convict us all of being sinners, and then he will convict us of the fact that Christ has obtained for us eternal redemption and righteousness which he offers us as a gift; but that if you don't accept it, the alternative is to dwell with the devil and his angels eternally. And maybe they are correct. I find it difficult to read these verses so.

I think with each particular thing that our Lord says the Holy Spirit will convict people of, the reason is given. 'Of sin . . .' Notice the particular thing. It is not because they have murdered their mothers-in-law, or beat their children to death, or gone on drugs and narcotics, or anything like that; it is not thinking of particular sins, bad as they may be. He is thinking of *the* cardinal, basic sin. 'Of sin, because they believe not' (v. 9). That is sin—not believing. Some people sin with their eyes shut. And praise God eyes can be opened to see who Jesus really is. But if the Holy Spirit has illumined people's eyes, and now they know the truth, as Hebrews says, 'If we sin willingly after having received the knowledge of the truth' (see 10:26), then that's another thing. This is the cardinal sin: with one's eyes open, having been convinced of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is the Christ, then deliberately to reject him and trample underfoot his deity and say his blood is common. That leaves nothing but fiery expectation of judgment (see v. 27).

'The Holy Spirit's very coming convicts the world,' says Christ: 'of sin,' because they didn't believe in him, and 'of righteousness,' on the other side. Whose righteousness? Why,

¹ Graham Staines, a missionary from Australia, and his two sons, Philip and Timothy, were burnt to death while sleeping in their vehicle in Odisha, India on 23rd January 1999. He is survived by his wife, Gladys, and their daughter, Esther.

his righteousness of course—our Lord's righteousness. He will convince the world that he was right and they were wrong. And, 'of righteousness, because I go to the Father' (v. 10). They were wrong in refusing to believe him; he was right. How do I know? Because God has raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand, and it is Jesus who has poured out the Holy Spirit. The context here is his justification: 'He is near that justifies me.' Here is his vindication.

Luke gives us a vivid account of the first task the Holy Spirit took in hand when he came down from heaven and visited our earth. Listen to Peter as he comes to the peroration of his first sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2: 'You want to know what this is? These people all around here are not drunk. This is what Joel prophesied of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This is the promise of the Father' (see vv. 14–16).

And someone might ask, 'Why has that happened just now?'

It has happened now, closely following upon the ascension of our blessed Lord.

'But what has the ascension to do with it?'

Well, it's not merely that the Holy Spirit came after our Lord ascended. It is that the Holy Spirit came because *he* poured out the Holy Spirit! Peter says, 'He, having received the promise of the Father, has poured out this that you see and hear' (see v. 33). It is the Lord Jesus who has done it.

For the moment, catch your breath. Ask yourself the question, 'Who then must Jesus be if he has poured out the Holy Spirit?' The Holy Spirit is not so much 'stuff', not like a lot of electric current, so that our Lord has flicked a heavenly switch and the current has come on. It would be blasphemous so to describe it. The Holy Spirit is the blessed third person of the Trinity and, just as the Father sent the Son, so it is also true to say that the Son has poured out the Holy Spirit of God.

Tell me now, who is he who plied the chisel and the saw in the shop at Nazareth? Who is he? Who is he on yonder hill, nailed to a cross and abused by all the religious authorities of the day? Who is he? They said he was a blasphemer. They would not believe on him—foul, cardinal sin. Who is he?

God has justified him. 'I shall not be ashamed,' says the Lord Jesus, 'of any of the claims I ever made.'

Oh, lovely Lord! He sits in heaven: glorified and vindicated. He is proven. Oh, listen to Peter sum up his sermon: 'It is *he* that has poured out the Holy Spirit whom you now see and hear. Therefore let all Israel know that this Jesus who you crucified, God has made him both Lord and Christ' (see v. 36). Oh, shout 'hallelujah' for the sake of your loved Lord! This is what the Holy Spirit came to do; and he gives priority to the main job: to vindicate the blessed Lord Jesus.

The Holy Spirit's witness and our work with him

It is our job too, for our blessed Lord put it this way: 'The Holy Spirit shall witness' (see John 15:26). That is number one. He is in charge of all the witness. You know that, don't you? It's not us; it's him, and he's been at it for these two thousand years. He has a great deal of experience in witnessing! And, 'You also shall be witnesses' (see v. 27).

I like that bit. That makes my trembling, nervous heart take a little bit of courage. If the Lord had said, 'Now I'm going to see to it that you witness, my boy!' That would sort of make me shake at the knees: 'I'll do the best I can, Lord.'

It's not that way round, is it? We serve a bigger God than that.

'I'm going,' he says. 'Now, as far as the witness goes, the Holy Spirit will be responsible. He'll witness.'

Thank the Lord for him!

'Would you like to do some? Well, so you may. You can be junior counsel for defence, if you like. He's the senior counsel.'

Yes, he's the one that witnesses for Christ. He will convict the world, 'of sin: because they believe not' on Christ. 'Of righteousness': because God has vindicated the Lord Jesus—he sits at God's right hand. And he will convict 'of judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged'. Ever since he deluded Adam and Eve in the garden, he has gone on with his story, slandering God and making people think that God is by definition against them. His slander has been answered at the cross. He has been defeated. The death knell already sounds for him, and one day he shall be cast in the lake of fire.

This is our Lord's vindication then, and we are required as God's servants, in submission to and dependence upon the Holy Spirit, to witness to the Lord Jesus. I like the objectivity of the thing, don't you? Well, perhaps that's me. I know a lot of people who have the blues, and it is our Lord's great ministry to speak words of comfort to those who are weary. We should remember the weary too and pray God to give us a similar tongue that knows how to speak words to them. But you can take subjectivism too far, and represent Christ as a how-to gospel of how to overcome moods and how to love your wife (if you have one) and how to bring up the children and how to recover from the blues when they come upon you, and how to be successful in business, until it's no more than half-baked psychology. Our first task, ladies and gentlemen, as under-servants under the Holy Spirit, is to witness to Christ and the glorious, historic fact that he is risen from the dead and is seated at the right hand of God in heaven. The opposition will be tough. You don't expect everybody to be converted by next Thursday afternoon, surely? And it will test our courage and test our nerve.

The justification of the Lord's servants

What about our vindication as servants of God? Well, we already have the work of the Holy Spirit, do we not, pressing home the word and witness to the heart? There is coming another day of vindication; it is marvellously thrilling and encouraging to read of. Writing to Timothy from his jail, Paul says,

I charge you in the sight of God, who quickens all things, and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession; that you keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in its own times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only has immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable; whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power eternal. Amen. (1 Tim 6:13–16)

It is the coming vindication. That was a tense moment, was it not, when our Lord stood before the high priests' court and, in response to the high priests' questions, answered virtually nil? When they questioned him about his teaching, he said, fairly enough, 'Well, why do you ask me? Ask these standing around. They all heard what I said,' for which he was slapped on the mouth (see John 18:19–22). When the high priests asked him about his disciples, he didn't answer.

Oh, magnificent Lord! He'll never embarrass you, you know. There stood by a disciple whose name was Peter, and when they asked him about his disciples, he could have said, 'Well, there's one of them here, look. He keeps on saying and swearing that he's not one of mine. He is really, you know.' No, when they asked him about his disciples, he didn't say anything. He is a magnificent Lord, isn't he? He will not push you to what you can't bear.

And it grew even more tense, for now the high priest put him on oath and said, 'We charge you . . .'. When he was put on oath by the high priest the Old Testament itself, in the book of Leviticus, demanded that, being put on oath, he should confess what he knew to be true (Lev 5:1). When they said, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of God?' knowing in that moment that if he said it he was sealing his doom, he spoke it! (see Matt 26:63–64). Oh, what magnificent witness for God! The salvation of the world depended on his willingness to open his mouth and speak; and he spoke, and it sealed his sentence.

They brought him to Pilate to be condemned, and Pilate interviewed him to see if he was a political threat. And our Lord replied: 'I came into this world to bear witness to the truth.'

'Truth?' said Pilate. 'What is truth, and what on earth has it got to do with politics?' (Well, as you will realize, it has very little to do with politics.) And then Pilate questioned him once more, and he answered him nothing. 'Now, look here, young man,' he said, 'you'd better start speaking. You care a lot about *truth*, but I have the *power*, you know. I have the power to hand you over to the cross, or to deliver you. So you'd better start speaking' (see John 18:28–38).

Paul writes to Timothy: 'I charge you before Jesus Christ who, before Pontius Pilate, witnessed the good confession, that you keep it without spot, without reproach.' It could be easy and full of joy, couldn't it, and you could see multitudes converted? It could be, for you, another, but lesser, Calvary. Some of our dear brothers and sisters in the Sudan are being crucified, literally so.

How shall we find the courage? Paul says to Timothy, 'Keep it until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.' This is the next vindication. 'That appearing,' says Paul, 'will be staged by God Almighty.'

Oh, what a spectacle that will be when God Almighty draws away the veil that hides the unseen world from our seen world – the *apocalypse* of our Lord, the *epiphany* of our Lord. God himself will stage it! All shall see him descend from the sky, including those who pierced him; and, to the confusion of the unregenerate world, they shall mourn because of him.

He's coming, my brothers and sisters. And he who is 'the blessed and only potentate', the ruler of the revolving spheres, as the hymn has it, shall stage the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It will be nice, won't it, when he comes and we get our turn in the queue? I don't know whether you'll have to queue up in heaven; I've never made up my mind about that. If there is a queue to come and have a word with the Saviour, wow, there will be a few million and

trillion to go in front of me! But we shan't have less access to him there than we have here, shall we? It will be lovely to tell the returning Lord: 'Lovely to see you, Lord, and, Lord, I didn't do too well, but I did try to witness for you.'

It will be a little bit embarrassing to say, 'Well, Lord, I got too scared, so I shut my mouth. Sorry. I gave the impression I wasn't a believer.'

It would be a little embarrassing, wouldn't it? When he is revealed, the blessed and only potentate shall reveal him.

I can't read that story without remembering a story in the Old Testament. Let me remind you of it. It happened when King David was old. Do you remember the story in 1 Kings 1? It says that now David was old and 'he gat no heat', to quote the words of the beloved Authorized Version (v. 1).

At that time, through the persuasion of Bathsheba and the counsel of Nathan the prophet, he had his son Solomon anointed as king. And Solomon was brought eventually into Jerusalem, and sat down on the throne of his father, David. Not everyone was happy about this arrangement, of course. Some about the place had their own plans for how the succession ought to go. Adonijah, another of the king's sons, had felt that the throne was surely going to pass to him. He had set things in place to have himself declared king, with some of the leading men in his father's government in full support of his bid. Imagine the dismay of Adonijah and these other men when they heard the news that David had declared, not Adonijah, but Solomon, king!

When that king was revealed as the true heir, there was plenty of shame to go around, and no small amount of embarrassment. But for those who had spoken up for the rightful king, even when it was somewhat dangerous to do so, for them there was great honour, not to speak of reward. In the end, those servants of the true king were vindicated; they were not put to shame at the revelation of David's son and heir.

How much more shall it be for those who have stood for their absent Lord, the rightful King of kings, in the day of his rejection? Oh, may he give us the courage to speak for him now, and to witness to who he is and what he has done. And in that day of his final justification before this world, we too shall be vindicated. So will we be able to say, 'He is near that justifies me; who will contend with me?'

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He has published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike