**FIRST THINGS**

**and**

**OTHER**

**MINISTRY**

**BY**

**JIM RENTON**

**Volume 2**

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# Introduction

This is one of two volumes which collect the articles of ministry by our brother Jim Renton that were first published in two magazines, *A Word in its Season* and *Notes of Ministry.* Almost none were published anywhere else, although there is a reading at three-day meetings in London in 1976 which also appeared in the book from those meetings. The articles run in date order from 1973 up to just before the Lord took our brother on 17 January 1994. I have added to these previously published articles ten other hitherto unpublished pieces for which records came to hand while the books were being assembled; these are identified by end notes. The articles are arranged in date order, with four un-dated pieces at the end of the second volume.

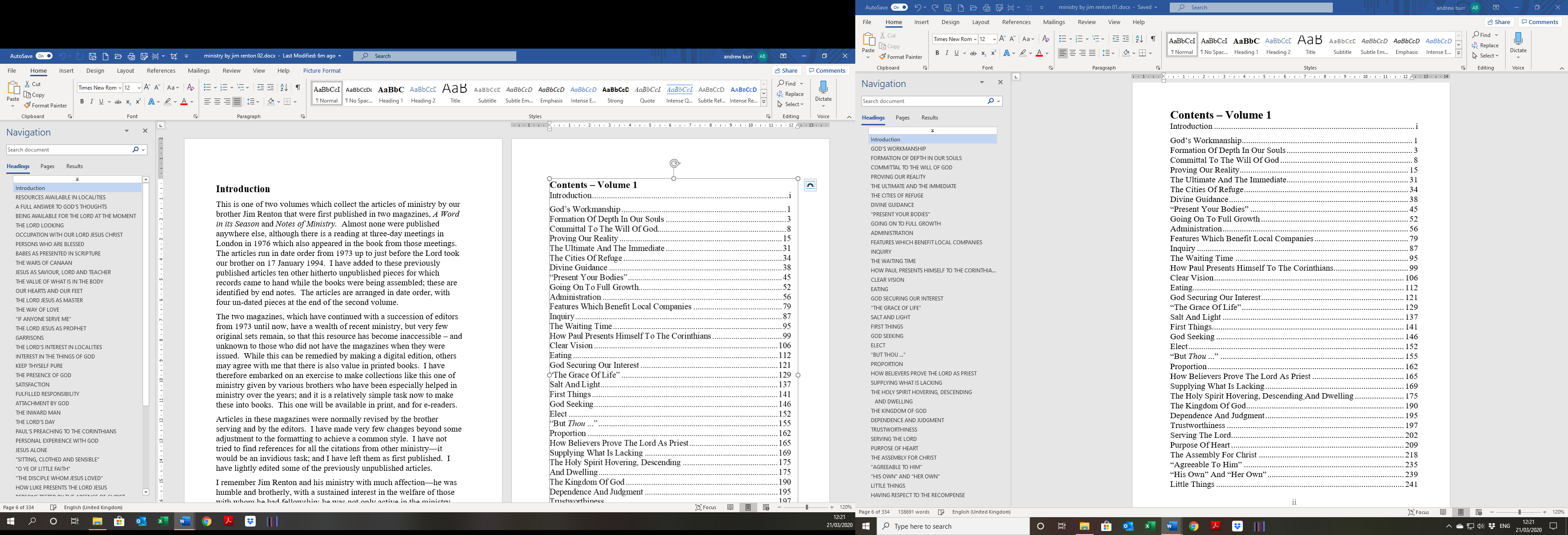
The two magazines, which have continued with a succession of editors from 1973 until now, have a wealth of recent ministry, but very few original sets remain, so that this resource has become inaccessible – and unknown to those who did not have the magazines when they were issued. While this can be remedied by making a digital edition, others may agree with me that there is also value in printed books. I have therefore embarked on an exercise to make collections like this one of ministry given by various brothers who have been especially helped in ministry over the years; and it is a relatively simple task now to make these into books. This one will be available in print, and for e-readers.

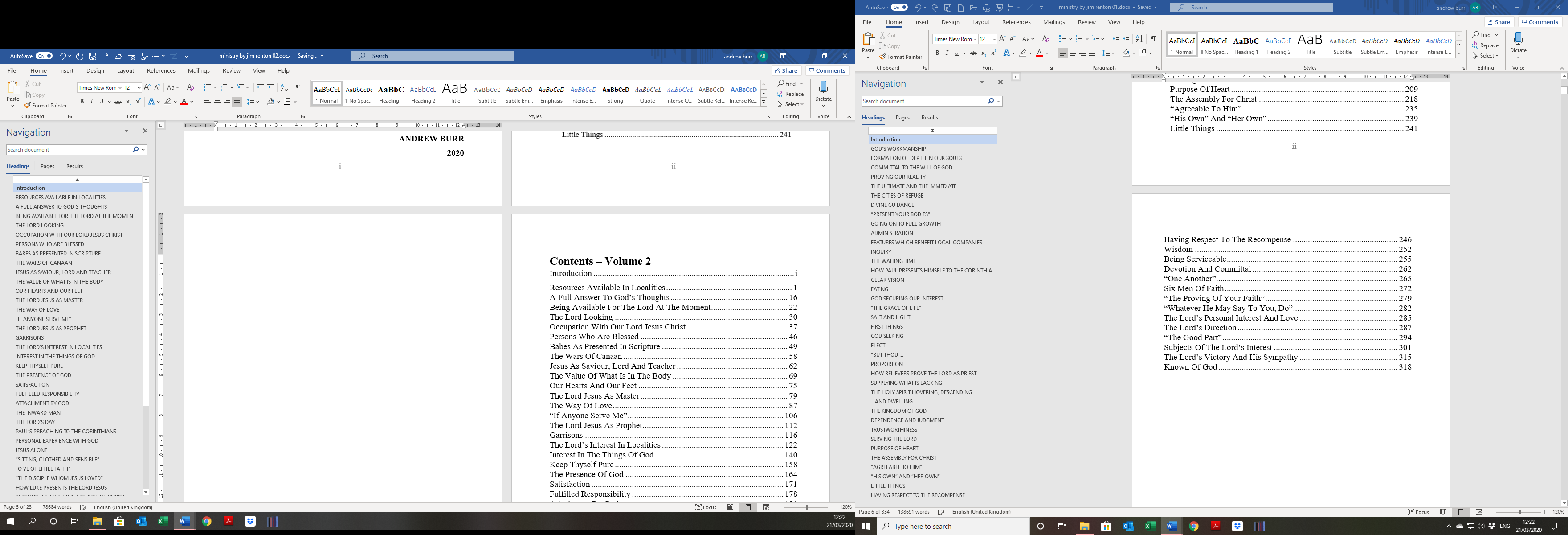
Articles in these magazines were normally revised by the brother serving and by the editors. I have made very few changes beyond some adjustment to the formatting to achieve a common style. I have not tried to find references for all the citations from other ministry—it would be an invidious task; and I have left them as first published. I have lightly edited some of the previously unpublished articles.

I remember Jim Renton and his ministry with much affection—he was humble and brotherly, with a sustained interest in the welfare of those with whom he had fellowship; he was not only active in the ministry himself, but very supportive of others serving in the Lord’s work. I trust others who are now able to read this selection will profit from it for the glory of the Lord.

**ANDREW BURR**

**2020**





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# RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN LOCALITIES

**1 Corinthians 1: 4-9**

**2 Kings 2: 19-22; 4: 1-7, 38-41**

J.R. We have been considering elsewhere how we can provide more for God in our localities. It is an exercise that would appeal to every lover of Christ, that there would be more for Him in our local settings. Were all our faces set in this direction it would bring about a unified condition. We rightly need to be exercised as to having our own needs met, and the Lord would provide us with everything that would meet our need, but we need to get around to considering what is for Him and how there can be more for Him. What these scriptures point out is this, that there is the wherewithal in every locality to provide more for God. The verses read in Corinthians indicate what there was in the locality. I have no doubt that in these verses Paul refers to how he left them. He spent eighteen months at Corinth and in these verses he recalls what he had witnessed in the place; the testimony of the Christ confirmed in them, they came short in no gift—there was the wherewithal to face every responsibility in view of the pleasure of God. In the absence of Paul there had been some deterioration and that tends to happen in all our places. We no longer have outstanding men of gift and leadership universally; it is divinely designed that that should be so, but as a result of the Lord’s activities in our localities there is sufficient to provide more for Him.

The scriptures read in 2 Kings indicate that there was a wherewithal in the place where Elisha was. He said, “Bring me a new cruse, and put salt in it”. These things were in Jericho. He did not bring them, they were there and he simply made use of what was in the locality. Similarly, in the house in chapter 4, there was a pot of oil which the woman did not appreciate, but there was abundance of means of meeting every obligation and every responsibility, and living on the rest. Later in chapter 4 he said, “Then bring meal”; he did not supply the meal, the meal was there, it was in the place. I think we need to see that the Lord has been good enough to place in our localities sufficient not only to meet every responsibility but to provide pleasure, and more and more pleasure for God.

L.MacF. That commends itself to the brethren, I am sure. Underlying what you have said is the faithfulness of God. He is quite able to bring in persons to fill out what is in His mind. But what a delight it would be to find this amongst us locally! I am sure there is the exercise that things should be continued in life until the coming of the Lord.

J.R. Very good. Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth, and that was quite a long time for Paul to be in any one place. He had in mind the establishment of conditions for God in the place. We have had abundance of ministry; we have over two hundred volumes of reliable ministry, we have five extensive reliable ministries. There has been an abundance of supply by the Lord. In this city you have known distinctive gift being in the place. What great extensive service there has been under the Lord! What a privilege to have such abundance of ministry! The need is not only to know the teaching in our heads (although we have to know it in our heads), but to be formed by what the Lord has given by means of distinctive gift which could be likened to Paul being in Corinth eighteen months.

G.H. I notice in this section the name of “our Lord Jesus Christ”—the full Name—is mentioned. I wonder if that would have a bearing on what you have in mind.

J.R. It would. “Our Lord Jesus Christ” comes in quite often in this first chapter. It is a collective idea; “our Lord Jesus Christ” is something that we are in together.

B.T. There were many in Corinth but what you are saying would apply also to where there are only two or three.

J.R. Quite so. If it is a locality where the service of God proceeds, where there are persons that meet together unto the name of the Lord, although there are only two or three there is the wherewithal to carry things for the pleasure of God. Is that what you have in mind?

B.T. Yes. One or two brothers may not feel so gifted as they were at Corinth but there is the wherewithal, the Lord is with them.

J.R. That is right. They have their exercises but there is usually evidence of great dependence where there are only two or three. Where there are twenty or thirty, or forty or fifty, in number, that is a great privilege, but it also brings its own exercises that maybe the two or three do not have in the same way. But the wherewithal is present where two or three gather “together unto my name”, Matt 18: 20.

A.P.D. Is it of interest that in Acts 18 Paul was teaching among them the word of God, see v 11? Is that important? There is not only the teaching but he was teaching among them the word of God. That element should be in the ministry, the unfolding of the truth but the element of the word of God. Is that right?

J.R. That is right. The word of God has its own character, and it is really the standard by which we adjust ourselves, judge ourselves, judge anything that is contrary to it.

A.P.D. It would affect the conscience and also the affections.

J.R. That is right. It is living and operative, sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates and divides, see Heb 4: 12. The word of God is meant to have an effect, as you say, on the conscience of us all, but also to result in some formation in affection and intelligence.

A.R.S. In the absence of outstanding gift, as it is in our locality here, we are apt to feel that things are very low, but it is encouraging to see that there is that in the locality which can be used of God.

J.R. Exactly. It requires committal on the part of each one of us to what is for the pleasure of God and to maintain what is according to His mind. You say there is not much in the way of gift; there is sufficient anyway. We are not living in a time of distinctive gift, as far as I can see; we are living in a time when the ministry of distinctive gifts ought to have its result with each one of us, and it would be in the body functioning and a mutuality and brotherly confidence in working things out together. That is the kind of time we are in. I am not saying there is no gift but there is not the same distinctive gift. Just as the apostles were given by the Lord at the beginning of the dispensation and did not continue, so distinctive gift in the recovery, as far as I can see, was not meant to continue, but we are meant to be the product of such ministry.

A.G.S. In the absence of distinctive gift we should be more dependent on the Holy Spirit.

J.R. That is right. We come to that in 2 Kings 4.

B.T. I was reading something interesting, that if you do not know what to say in a reading as bearing on the scripture that you are reading, if you have a link with the Head you will be given what to say on the spot.

J.R. I am sure that is so, but what do we know about it? Does it work? It ought to be working more. I agree with what you say.

B.T. Does that link with, “If any one speak—as oracles of God”, 1 Pet 4: 11?

J.R. Quite so; and that would depend on what was said about the presence of the Spirit and our being in contact with the Spirit. Is it not by the Spirit that the impulse from the Head comes, the Spirit in us actively? In Ephesians 4 we have mention of the gifts: “some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers”, v 11. That obviously applies to the whole dispensation because apostles had a comparatively short time of service. The Lord provided for the whole dispensation and the ultimate result is “holding the truth in love, we may grow up to him in all things, who is the head, the Christ: from whom the whole body, fitted together”. The product of distinctive ministries is meant to produce this body feeling and body operating by contact with the Head by the Spirit according to the working in its measure of each one part. While the one body is a universal idea, Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 says “Ye are Christ’s body” (v 27), that is the Corinthians; the character of the body was to operate in that locality. It does not say, Ye are the body of Christ, because that is universal, but “ye are Christ’s body”, that is, the body without the article; it is the character that is to operate in our places.

B.H.W. Would it have in view the enrichment that is spoken of in this chapter, “ye have been enriched in him, in all word”? It has been said, I believe, that the first nine verses of Corinthians are like Ephesians, viewing the saints from the heights, what they have.

J.R. That is so. But I am sure Paul saw that in Corinth before he left it. He was eighteen months there and he would not leave Corinth deficient in any way: “in everything ye have been enriched in him, in all word of doctrine, and all knowledge, (according as the testimony of the Christ has been confirmed in you,)”. He and those with him brought the testimony of the Christ into that place and there was confirmation of result in the locality. That is how he left them; his influence would no doubt have been felt while he was there, but his absence was the test. The absence of Christ is the test to believers at the present time, and the absence of distinctive gift is a test to us in our localities as to how we are getting on.

J.A.P. Is that why we get such precious things in Corinth? There is reference to the temple: “ye are the temple of God” (1 Cor 3: 16); then again: “when ye come together in assembly” (1 Cor 11: 18), and then in chapter 12 the body, as if Paul said, This will always exist. Is that what you are at?

J.R. Exactly. Paul did not want to go to Corinth; he wrote instead. If he had gone there he would have put things right, but he counts on the wherewithal in the place to operate so that things become improved. Most of our localities are like Corinth really, practically.

G.H. You mentioned that at the present time we do not have distinctive leadership or gift; do you mean that the Lord is looking for some definite result from all these ministries at the present time?

J.R. Exactly.

L.MacF. So there is the need of faithfulness, as in 2 Timothy where things are committed to faithful men. You would look for that—brethren who are faithful to the light that has been handed on to us and faithful to our responsibility locally.

J.R. Quite so. In that scripture you mention in 2 Timothy responsibilities and privileges come to “others also”, and they have to become faithful men in order to pass these precious things on unimpaired to others also. That is how generations are meant to continue, generation after generation; it comes to us as “others also” and it is passed on as we become faithful men. Otherwise there is some deterioration and we do not want to see that, for if it is so, there is not more for God but there is less for God.

C.C.G. “Now I wish all men to be even as myself: but every one has his own gift of God: one man thus, and another thus”, 1 Cor 7: 7. Is there a suggestion there that there are different degrees of gift?

J.R. Literally it applies to married and unmarried. What is in your mind?

C.C.G. I was thinking of gift, you mentioned gift before.

J.R. “His own gift”: what other word could you use? His own grace, his own outlook, his own link with the Lord, I suppose. We can think of gift in different ways. We speak of gift as something sovereignly given by the Lord in view of ministry or preaching, but gift in 1 Corinthians 7: 7 is the word ‘charisma’, that is, his own place, it is how he works things out for himself. One man thus and another thus, he says, “I wish all men to be even as myself” (he was unmarried we understand).

B.H.W. It refers to a footnote in Romans 5: 16: act of favour.

J.R. It is how we work out things in our own life. This refers to a man’s private life.

C.C.G. It also says, “Be not negligent of the gift that is in thee”, 1 Tim 4: 14. That is something to think of too; each one would have something that could be offered to God.

J.R. “The gift that is in thee” in that context would be something distinctive given to Timothy. But then according to Romans 12 each one has been given a measure of faith that is gift common to every believer; “as God has dealt to each a measure of faith” (v 3), and then according to Ephesians 4, “but to each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ” v 7. Each one has something in which to operate in the body. “To each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ”, and it says in that same chapter “from whom the whole body, fitted together, and connected by every joint of supply, according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self building up in love”, v 16. So this gift of the Christ according to the measure given of verse 7 is the measure in which each one has his and her part in the body of Christ according to verse.

S.E.H. Are there different gifts that are in prominence at different stages of the dispensation? You made reference recently to the finishing touches that the Spirit is putting on the assembly. Would different gifts be prominent in that service compared to the early stages of the dispensation where there were the gifts of healing, and apostles which were meant to spread the glad tidings widely at that time?

J.R. I think what you say is right. At the beginning there were what we call sign gifts—healing, miracles and so on: these were used for the establishment of Christianity. We would not expect sign gifts today; we are in a time of what you refer to as the refining features of the Spirit’s nearly two thousand years of assembly formation; and the operation of the body would be a part of that refining process, the body really functioning in our localities. We have different personalities; these have to be submerged in view of the operatic of the one body and operating according to the measure of the gift of the Christ

B.H.W. What you say is interesting because quite a few believers, I understand, become involved in speaking with tongues now. That was a sign gift that was prominent at the early part of the dispensation. Would that fit in?

J.R. Exactly. We do not want to despise our fellow believers, we are thankful if they are believers at all; but as far as I can see, speaking with tongues makes much of self, that I have arrived at something. In any case what they speak may not be a known tongue. We need to have the outlook not what is for me but what is for God. How can there be more for God?

B.H.W. You spoke about it being a sign at that time; it was needed and had a purpose.

J.R. There was a power there that could be taken account of publicly manifested at the beginning.

C.F.D. We are not in the time of apostles and prophets formally but is the element of prophecy the bringing in of the word of God and the mind of God? Is that what is needed to maintain the principles of the house of God locally, but too for the maintenance of life and vitality? Does that lay an emphasis on the meeting for prophetic ministry?

J.R. In fact it lays emphasis on all our meetings because we benefit more than we realise by actually coming together, by the influence of being in the company of one another. We are going to be together eternally but we gather in our localities now. Did you ever come to a meeting where you did not get something as you came expectantly?

C.F.D. I think if we come up in faith the Lord is always faithful Himself and He will provide us with something. Therefore is it in your mind that, for instance, 1 Corinthians 14 involves sitting down together and we can all prophecy one by one, showing how edification would come in—in the local reading or city reading, whatever it might be.

J.R. Exactly. The coming together is the evidence of belonging to one another. Paul speaks about the body involving “members one of another”, Eph 4: 25. Therefore there is a link with one another and that is experienced as we are together. It helps in unity, it helps in growing together in our places.

C.F.D. What you are referring to is interesting because it is really being let go and coming to our own; it is that atmosphere and that spirit; we are amongst our own and that should grow on us.

J.R. Exactly. So we come to 2 Kings, this incident in Jericho. “And the men of the city said to Elisha, Behold now, the situation of the city is good ... but the water is bad, and the land is barren”. These were persons who were exercised about conditions in the place; there could be improvement. I do not know any locality where conditions could not improve. This is the exercise of these men, whether they were elders or what they were it does not say, but they call Elisha’s attention to the fact that things could be better. They are really saying, Things could be better in our place. What is the remedy? He says “Bring me a new cruse, and put salt in it”. He did not provide anything, he only used what was there. “Bring me” he says “a new cruse, and put salt in it”; they were in the place and to be made use of. It is the idea of what is new, not the old thing, not the working of the flesh, not the working of the natural man, but what is new, what belongs characteristically to Christianity. And put salt in it; salt has its own character. You cannot imitate salt, salt is a product having its own character. It would mean for us reality. It is not imitating something else or somebody else; it is each one active in his own setting, you might say in his own measure. The Lord speaks about new wine in new skins; the new wine would be the teaching of Christianity and the new skins would be the constitution that Christianity builds up. The new cruse would be this kind of constitution.

T.E.D. I was thinking as to the spirit of Elijah resting on Elisha and wonder if that is not a further emphasis on what has already been said as to the value of the Spirit’s presence at the present time.

J.R. Elisha has the double portion of Elijah’s spirit. He said, “Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me”, chap 2: 9. The double portion belongs to Christianity, it belongs to the firstborn; the family to which we belong is “the assembly of the firstborn”, Heb 12: 23. The double portion belongs to it.

J.A.P. I have been thinking of this city of Jericho for some weeks from the point of view that the elders were quite honest. This is what the need is in our city, and God helps when that is owned.

J.R. That is very important, I am sure. We need to be preserved from a complacent attitude. The enemy would give us a sense of complacency to hinder exercise in view of better conditions for God in our places; that is the exercise in Jericho. But they had the new cruse and they had the salt; it was a question of putting the salt into the new cruse and it was put at the source of the waters and they were healed.

C.C.G. “Salt then is good, but if the salt also has become savourless, wherewith shall it be seasoned?” Luke 14: 34. What would you say in relation to the savour of salt? It mentions seasoning; now if it is lost, what would constitute salt becoming savourless?

J.R. It shows that if salt becomes savourless nothing can make it salt again. Salt has its own character, its own feature, its own taste; it is distinctive, it is preservative. Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 speaks about leaven: “Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, according as ye are unleavened”, v 7. Leaven does not operate where there is abundance of salt. You cannot have salt and leaven operating at the same time. Salt might refer to self-judgment as we speak of it, but it certainly would refer to reality, the single eye, that kind of character. If that is lost nothing can make it salt again; that shows the character of it.

C.C.G. It speaks of it being worthless.

J.R. Exactly, it is worthless. That is what has happened in mere profession; I was going to say Christendom, but after all we are part of Christendom. Mere profession is savourless. It professes to be salt but it is savour less, it has not the real character.

A.P.D. The result is no more death or barrenness. We have seen a lot of sorrowful things happen and we would love to see fruitfulness amongst us. How can we reach that? How can we be helped about that?

J.R. Have you any suggestion to make?

A.P.D. No. It is interesting to me that it is not only no more death but no more barrenness. It says, “He maketh the barren woman to keep house”, Ps 113: 9. There is to be fruitfulness in our localities.

J.R. Where there is life there will be fruit, fruit for God.

C.F.D. Should there be the concern locally, as with the men of the city to whom you have referred, to search out for the cruse, search out for the salt? Would it be that in our localities we are trying to bring the best out of the brethren, we are trying to find and bring into evidence the work of the Spirit of God that has been going on, you might say, in secret. Locally should there be the line of manhood with us that makes way for that to come into evidence?

J.R. So the new cruse would go back to new birth, I suppose, the work of God. How can we get right down to the work of God in persons, how can we promote that how can we link on with that? The cruse is new, there is nothing of the old in the new; there is nothing of the old character in new birth. In fact born anew emphasises the fact that it is altogether different, entirely fresh, entirely different from the old. There is no carry-over; difficulties arise when there is the carry-over of the old and not being true, as the salt would indicate, to the new.

A.S.H. What do you have to say further as to the source?

J.R. Is the source of things Christ as Lord and Head? Or do things come from another source? The source of new birth is God, it leads to being born of God, children of God. That is the idea of the new cruse, I think; it is what is proper to the divine family; it is new and nothing of the old in it.

A.S.H. The hymn says

In Christ Jesus—new creation

(Hymn 37).

J.R. That is just it. That is how we are going to be eternally, but the same thing is to work now in our local settings.

B.H.W. Would the new cruse be linked in any way with the inward man of Romans 7?

J.R. Quite so. “I myself with the mind serve God’s law” (v 25) is the believer identifying himself with the work of God. The real ‘I’ is not according to the flesh, the real ‘I’ is according to God.

G.H. It says “Have salt in yourselves”, Mark 9: 50. The prodigal went to the far country and in his misery it says about him: “coming to himself”, Luke 15: 17. Would that be the work of God in the young man and the salt?

J.R. Yes, I think that is right. To me salt suggests reality, not just mere profession. Of course, we are professors, but not, I trust, mere professors.

G.H. So that the salt was in evidence, it was real with him.

J.R. Exactly. It says at the end of that scripture you quote: “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another”. What is the basis for peace with one another? It is not peace at any price, but there is peace in pursuing this line of more for God and what is new and what is real. So in chapter 4 we have the pot of oil. This woman was in a very difficult situation. In chapter 2 it is death and unfruitfulness and there is life and fruit, but here it is bondage, “Elisha said to her, What shall I do for thee? Tell me, what hast thou in the house?” There was something in the place that was the answer to the whole situation. “And she said, Thy handmaid has not anything at all in the house but a pot of oil”. She did not have regard for what she had; she had not a true value of what was in the place. The pot of oil would no doubt suggest the potential there is in the Spirit because this pot of oil filled every vessel available and it stayed. It is the potential we have in the Spirit which we need to draw from increasingly; we need to value the Holy Spirit.

B.H.W. We have had a lot of sorrow and reductions but what do we have in the house? We have the Spirit; the oil stayed after the vessels were all filled.

J.R. That is right. The vessels were all filled and the word was “Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt”; that is, the filled vessels met every responsibility and then the oil stayed; there was still oil there. There is the wherewithal to fulfil responsibility in our localities and live; “Live thou and thy sons on the rest”.

L.MacF. What is involved in the neighbours?

J.R. You are very neighbourly in these parts, I understand, as far as localities are concerned. It does not say a little pot or a big pot, but there is enough in that pot potentially to meet every responsibility. As well as privileges in our localities we have responsibilities which we ought to face up to. Each vessel met each responsibility. The vessels were full, and the oil stayed; the oil was the means of life. The man of God said “Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt”; that is, the vessels were available to meet every responsibility. Responsibilities ought to be fulfilled; are they neglected? Where is the potential for taking up every responsibility? It is in the Spirit. I remember being helped years ago by the word. No matter how weak we feel that is always authority to act and the authority is the name of the Lord, the power is the Spirit and power will be realised as the authority is used.

J.A.P. It is a very critical thing here which we are all facing—the creditor has come to take the children. It is a serious concern in our land and in my own house, indeed, this matter of the children. She was feeling it too and the prophet was helping her through. I do not know how you would work that out but you spoke of the generation to come and faithful men. It would have been an awful thing for the children to go.

J.R. This woman is bereft: “Thy servant my husband is dead”. She no longer has the support that she had counted on, she is left to her own resources. It is like our localities, like Corinth in the absence of Paul, she had not that resource to count upon. But the resource is in the pot of oil actually in the house but not appreciated as it ought to be.

O.L.L. What would you say about the household? This woman is the wife of the prophet and do you not think she should have been exercised about something before she went to Elisha? The household should have known something about depending upon God.

J.R. That is true, but it is a pathetic scene here, she is bereft. She would normally have looked to her husband to take responsibilities but the responsibilities are left with her and she feels her insufficiency. It is quite a good thing to feel our insufficiency; in fact it is not so good for us if we think we are sufficient. She felt her insufficiency. And what was the answer? The answer was what she had available in the pot of oil; the potential there is in the Spirit in our localities, which means using the Spirit, drawing upon the Spirit.

C.S.E. In one sense the present time is the only time we will ever have and I think we ought to appreciate it more in that there can be dependence on the Spirit in us so that there is more formation for God. It could be that what is distinctive might actually not help the development as it should. I think there is no mistake in the ways of God if He leaves us as He does at the present time. I think it is for the development in the power of the Spirit of each of us individually so that there can be more for God.

J.R. What you say is perfectly true; now is the time to get to know the Spirit in the final refining time. We were saying elsewhere that it was towards the end of one hundred and twenty years of distinctive ministry that our attention was called to the Spirit, and now is the time to get to know the Spirit personally and to make use of the potential there is in the Spirit in our places. This woman is bereft, she is a widow. Have we not been bereft? Have we not lost many of our dear brethren who could have helped us and are no longer available? This kind of attitude of dependence and insufficiency would help us as attention is called to what there is: to the woman the pot of oil to us the presence of the Holy Spirit.

C.F.D. In regard to filling every vessel that is available, do you think that while we caught the spirit and the intent of the ministry regarding the Spirit viewed objectively and response to Him, we are in the time now when the power of the Spirit of God should become a known thing locally, so that as each vessel is filled it displaces anything that is not of the Spirit? Does it involve that matters that are not according to the Spirit of God in our localities should come under our attention?

J.R. I think we have been more like Laban than like Rebecca. The servant came along in Genesis 24 and Laban said to him, “Come in, blessed of Jehovah! why standest thou outside? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels”, v 31. You say, What a fine locality this is. Laban is the leading man in the place making way for the Spirit. Is he? Towards the end of the chapter he is suggesting, Why all the urgency? Let us wait ten days, let us take it easy, let us have our own ideas. Have we not been a bit like that? Our attention has been called to the Spirit and we profess to respond to Him, but how is it worked out? Not as it ought to have been.

A.S.H. The woman went in the right direction. She could have gone to the neighbour seeking help but she went to the man of God.

J.R. The man of God for us would possibly suggest what the Lord is saying presently in ministry. What is He saying in ministry? I have been impressed with the fact that so much is said in ministry as to the Holy Spirit. I think that is one thing the Lord is saying to us very definitely.

G.H. Would you say something more about the Spirit?

J.R. Elisha, the man of God, would possibly represent what the Lord is saying at the moment in ministry, and as far as I can see in ministry the Lord is calling attention to the Holy Spirit and the need for us to be more depending on Him, and to experience what He can be to us in our local settings in responsibilities and privileges.

A.R.S. The sense of our insufficiency should not make us discouraged.

J.R. The Lord is pleased with that attitude. If we are complacent and think we are able for things, I do not think that the Lord gets much pleasure, but if we have a sense of insufficiency we will make way for the Lord helping us and we will make way for the Spirit helping us because we will be depending on Him. Lastly there is the man who shredded wild colocynths into the pot, bringing in of what is foreign. There again the man of God said “Bring meal”. The meal was there. He did not bring it, it was in the locality. The burden I have is just to call attention to the fact that there is the wherewithal in our places to maintain things for God’s pleasure.

J.A.P. In confirmation of that, in Luke 24, where the brethren were upset, they had something, they had the honeycomb and the Lord made much of that.

J.R. That is right. When the Lord said, “Have ye anything here to eat?” He meant, Have ye anything here for Me to eat. They had, as you say, and He ate before them. That is what the Lord is looking for, Have you anything here to eat? He would say, I have provided you with plenty, and so He has. We have over two hundred volumes of distinctive, reliable ministry. In spite of what went on in the 1960s, in 1970 we had for the first time in history every one of these volumes available as if the Lord was over all that was going on to provide us with such abundance of reliable ministry to build us up in view of our formation, not only in view of our knowledge, for “knowledge puffs up, but love edifies”, 1 Cor 8: 1.

**NEW YORK**

**28th April 1984**

**Key to initials -**

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# A FULL ANSWER TO GOD’S THOUGHTS

**Genesis 12: 1-5; 30: 25-28**

**Exodus 2: 15-22**

**2 Samuel 7: 17-20**

I desire to speak, dear brethren, of the importance of coming into the fulness of what God has in mind for us. I suppose we are all believers here and there has been on the part of each one some answer to the preaching of the glad tidings, but there is always a tendency to stop short. The enemy would occupy us with other things, but the great need is to come into the fulness of what God has in mind. The Lord would attract us and the Spirit would help us, and we need to encourage one another to provide for God more than a partial answer to His approach to us. God’s great end in approaching us is that there should be a result for Himself in life and fruit.

These scriptures illustrate in some way what is in mind. We begin with Abraham, who was called. If you read chapter 11 you would think it was Terah who was called because it says in verse 31, “Terah took Abram his son ... and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went forth together out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to go into the land of Canaan, and came as far as Haran, and dwelt there”. But Terah was not the one who was called. Genesis 12 begins, “And Jehovah had said to Abram”, so Abram is the one who was in the divine mind in the call. Stephen in his address in Acts 7 tells us, “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran ... and thence, after his father died, he removed him into this land”, the land of Canaan. Therefore something hindered Abraham. Paul in Hebrews 11 does not tell us that Abraham was detained; “By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go out into the place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and went out, not knowing where he was going” Heb 11: 8. What a man Abraham was! It ill becomes us to be too critical of him, and yet, great man as he was, he was detained in Haran. After his father died, Stephen tells us, he came into the land of Canaan, therefore he was hindered by what was natural, the claims of the natural.

We have to face the fact, dear brethren, that the claims of the natural are very strong indeed. If the claims of the natural hindered a man like Abraham, how much more have we to be on our guard. We have to distinguish between the flesh and the natural. The flesh is the result of the evil poison that had its origin in the serpent and is in every one of us, but natural relationships are of God, but they are not to hinder our full answer to God’s call. The call in the glad tidings has come to every one here, and I suppose every one has answered somewhat to that call, but would there be some hindrance to coming into the fulness of what God has in mind? Even Abraham, who went out not knowing where he was going, as Paul tells us, was hindered. When he was in Ur of the Chaldeans, “Jehovah had said to Abram, Go out of thy land, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house to the land that I will show thee”. He left the land in which he lived, which would be a big sacrifice for Abraham, but he did not leave his kindred and he came as far as Haran. How long he was there we do not know.

Something must have stirred in Abraham, something must have reminded him of his call and God’s promise, which made him move further. “The land that I will shew thee” was not Haran. God made a great promise to Abraham, “I will make of thee a great nation, and bless thee”, but the blessing would be his as coming into the land “that I will shew thee”. But he was held up at Haran. I wonder how many of us are like that. A meeting like this might stimulate us. Maybe some touch from the Lord will be necessary that someone here may desire to come into the fulness of divine blessing. We tend to settle down; even Abraham settled down, how more likely are we to settle down in a kind of half-way house. So “Abram departed as Jehovah had said to him. And Lot went with him ... And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had acquired, and the souls that they had obtained in Haran”. There was something acquired in that half-way house but the fulness of things belonged to the land “that I will shew thee”, the land that he was promised.

The land in the Old Testament answers for us to the enjoyment of eternal life. We have the light of eternal life, and the refining touches that the Spirit has in mind to accomplish at the present time would involve in our localities the enjoyment of eternal life. Eternal life is enjoyed when we are together, the Lord in control, the Spirit free, loving one another; that is the area of eternal life. We have the truth of it, but the Lord would have us move from the half-way house of just knowing about it to be exercised to have the full enjoyment of it. It involves unity, as seen in Psalm 133, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” There the Lord commands the blessing, life for evermore. Eternal life is a blessing the Lord has in mind for us to enjoy as we are together in unity. So it says here, “and they went out to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came”—he arrived at the fulness of what God had in mind in calling him at the beginning.

In Genesis 30 we find Jacob who had left the land of Canaan, his place and his country, and it was right he should do so to get a wife. He was sent by his father with his blessing and he was there fourteen years. That was a long time, and yet he was obliged to be there fourteen years, because he served seven years for Rachel and he so loved her that they were in his eyes as single days, but he was given Leah instead of Rachel and he had to serve another seven years. Then Joseph is born who is a remarkable type of the Lord Jesus; it is when Joseph was born that Jacob desired to move—for us it would mean that Jacob got an impression of Christ that caused him to think of his true place. It says, “And it came to pass when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, Send me away, that I may go to my place and to my country”. He proposed to go to where he really belonged. He knew where he belonged and it was in his heart to go, but he was detained six years because of personal advantage. Laban made a proposal to him and he could see that if he stayed in Padan-Aram he would acquire more goods; personal advantage detained him there; how sad!

Sometimes what is natural detains us, for what is natural is very strong, but it has to be superseded by what is spiritual. Then we have to judge any feature of personal advantage which might be a means of detaining us from coming into what Jacob speaks of as “my place and ... my country”. A meeting like this provides an occasion for coming to decisions. If there is the presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ, His grace, His attractiveness, what there is for Him, does it touch some chord that will result in a decision? Jacob makes this decision here, but personal advantage, more of this world’s goods, hindered him another six years. Do not be hindered, dear fellow-believer. Do not let what is natural hinder you, do not let any personal advantage hinder you. What is for God is far more blessed, Jacob’s place and his country would for us be God’s purpose. Let nothing hinder our coming into the full possession of what God has in mind.

We read about Moses. Moses had been brought up in Pharaoh’s court. He was forty years old at the time of this incident. To refer again to Stephen’s address, “Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds”, Acts 7: 22. What a speaker he would be, whether he spoke on politics or business or whatever subject, he was mighty in his words—and in his deeds, whether in sport or in the army, he was a great man in Egypt. Just previous to where we read he slew an Egyptian. I suppose it would not cause much effort for Moses, a man mighty in deeds, to slay an Egyptian. He had right desires in doing so but he had to learn another way; God had another way. “Moses fled from before Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian. And he sat by the well”. Mighty in words and deeds, instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, there he was sitting by the well. What a fine attitude that was! He was drawing from another source, he was learning that there was not sufficiency in self. Like that woman that we read of earlier who was bereft of her husband and was resourceless but found resource in the oil, which would be for us the Spirit, so Moses is deriving from another source; he sat by the well, unlearning—and learning another way, learning to depend on the Holy Spirit. He is not detained by what is natural here and he is not there for personal advantage as he might have been in Egypt; he is learning another way.

It says, “And he sat by the well. And the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came … And the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses rose and helped them”. He did not tackle the shepherds; he no doubt would have been able for these shepherds, for he was mighty in his words and deeds, but he did not act like that. He acted in a different way altogether, he rose up and helped the daughters; he was on a positive line, he was helping. So it says, “And Moses consented to remain with the man”. It was the will of God, and he consented. He did not rebel; he did not say, This is not good enough for a man like me with all the learning I have had; he consented to dwell with the man in the locality where he was. “And Moses consented to remain with the man; and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter”; he was given her; he did not take her, he was given her; he consented to remain with the man and he accepted Zipporah.

She was not too easy; it is like accepting conditions in our local setting. We have not chosen one another. Moses did not choose Zipporah, he was given Zipporah and he consented. How important it is to consent to accept our local conditions. We have not selected one another, but we have the best conditions that God can give us in which to work and learn together. He consented to remain with the man; he accepted what he was given in that local setting and he was there for forty years. He trained there, he learned by working with Zipporah for forty years to lead two million people in the wilderness for forty years; it was all part of his training in view of his service and being available for what God had in mind. He began by consenting and accepting the conditions as they were as the ordering of God and the will of God. Let us be those who consent and who accept, and work among, our local brethren God has given to us. From one point of view the Lord is saying to us, These people in your locality are good enough for Me to live with eternally and I will give them to you for a few years to work with. Let us view one another this way, dear brethren; let us get the best out of one another. Moses got the best from Zipporah; there was result, there was the son Gershom and another one later, there was fruit, and it came about by his consenting and accepting attitude.

David, in 2 Samuel, had to learn God’s way. David had his own ideas and they appeared to be good, in fact, he is thinking about God—“And it came to pass when the king dwelt in his house, and Jehovah had given him rest round about from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedars, and the ark of God dwells under curtains”, 2 Sam 7: l, 2. He had God’s house in mind but he had his own ideas about it and Jehovah said to him, No, David, not your way, My way. That often happens in our histories; we have our own thoughts. We sometimes are upset because things do not work out the way we think they ought to work out. Jehovah said, No, David, I appreciate what you have in mind but it is going to be My way. Did David sulk about that? Did he rebel? It says, “And king David went in and sat before Jehovah, and said, Who am I, Lord Jehovah, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?” The answer is in the presence of God.

It is to David’s credit that he accepted that his way was not God’s way. God’s way is always best, not only for ourselves but for Him and in the result for Him. David says, “yet this hath been a small thing in thy sight, Lord Jehovah; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, Lord Jehovah?” He is saying, Is it such a one as I that has come into all this blessing? David learned the blessing of accepting God’s way. Is this the manner of man? Even such as I? Even such as ourselves, dear brethren, can have our part in doing things God’s way. “And is this the manner of man, Lord Jehovah? And what can David say more to thee?” He is a worshipper here, he sees that God’s way is better than his way and there is great blessing attached to it. He becomes a worshipper, he comes into the fulness of the knowledge of God in this chapter and into the light that God had in mind, sonship in Solomon.

That is all I have to say, dear brethren. May we be encouraged. May we not be detained. May we be set to go on to fulness for God’s glory and pleasure.

**BROOKLYN NY**

**28th April 1984**

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# BEING AVAILABLE FOR THE LORD AT THE MOMENT

**John 18: 4-9**

**Genesis 3: 8-10**

**1 Samuel 10: 20-23; 13: 5-7**

**Isaiah 6: 1-8**

It is in mind to say something about being available to the Lord for what He has in mind for us at the present moment. We are in a time of difficulty and public ruin, but the work of the Lord is going on; the Spirit is here—‘The Spirit all the truth sustains’, we sometimes sing (No 436)—and the Spirit is available to help any who are committed to the Lord Jesus and to the testimony. In 2 Timothy, when the ruin of the church publicly came in, Timothy was discouraged, and Paul’s word was “God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion. Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner”, 2 Tim 1: 7, 8. The testimony of our Lord is still here, and the Lord would have every one of us committed to Him and to His testimony at the present time. There is public failure; it is a day such as the prophet Zechariah spoke of: “the day of small things”, chap 4: 10. It is a day of small things publicly, but a day of great things secretly and spiritually, because we are near to what we speak of as the rapture, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ when the Spirit and the bride say, Come, when the Father’s perfect time will be completed and the Lord Jesus will come for all His own. What a moment that will be! We do well to dwell on the greatness of the moment that is before us. We do not wait for an event exactly, we wait for a Person, but it will be a very great event nevertheless. All the Old Testament saints, from Abel who was the first that we know of to have died all those centuries ago, are going to be raised. The Lord Jesus rules over dead and living (see Rom 14: 9) and the dead in Christ are going to rise. Think of what that will mean, what a moment it will be! All the New Testament saints, those who sleep in Jesus, will be raised at that same moment, and, as Paul writes; “*we*, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them ... to meet the Lord in the air”, 1 Thess 4: 17. We wait for the Lord Himself who will make all this an actuality. The coming of the Lord is imminent. It has been said for many years that His coming is imminent, but it is more imminent than ever it was. Among believers there is a stirring of heart expecting the coming of the Lord. Then look out on the world around us, there is hardly a nation where there is not trouble. On the one hand there is expectancy among believers, on the other hand there is the imminence of the great tribulation and judgment. From both points of view, the coming of the Lord is imminent.

The Lord is therefore looking for persons to have part in His testimony according to His thoughts at the present time. I desire to speak first of all about the Lord Jesus and how available He was at the critical moment in the history of the world when He took upon Himself the great work of redemption. He was available. In Leviticus 16, in connection with the scapegoat, or the goat that was for Azazel as in the New Translation, we read “and Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the living goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, and he shall put them on the head of the goat, and shall send him away to the wilderness by the hand of a man standing ready”, v 21. Who could answer to the man standing ready except the Lord Jesus Christ who was available to undertake all that was required for the securing of God’s will and God’s pleasure as well as the blessing of our souls? Thus as we read: “Jesus therefore, knowing all things that were coming upon him, went forth”. Think of that movement on the part of the Lord Jesus, all in view of the will of God and all that that will had in mind! Think of the greatness of divine purpose before the world’s foundation and who was going to accomplish it! The One who undertook that great work was the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing all that was coming upon Him, knowing the suffering involved, knowing the darkness He had to go into, knowing also the One who was going to save Him out of death (for He was going into death): all this was before Him along with all the mocking and animosity of men: “Jesus therefore, knowing all things that were coming upon him, went forth”. The Lord Jesus was the Man standing ready in view of accomplishing the great work of redemption, in view of securing a universe for God, in view of men recovered for God’s pleasure. “Jesus ... knowing all things that were coming upon him”; He knew it all, He faced it all in Gethsemane according to Matthew, Mark and Luke, agonising with His Father regarding that matter and here He “went forth and said to them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus the Nazaræan. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go away; that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke, As to those whom thou hast given me, I have not lost one of them”. The Lord will not lose one of His own; knowing all the things that were before Him He went forth alone in view of their salvation. We do not know what is before us, but we need to commit ourselves in our measure. The Lord’s committal was full and perfect, but we need to commit ourselves according to our measure to have part in the testimony of our Lord at this time. What a model He is! He is more than a model here, He is an object for our affections. He said “if therefore ye seek me, let these go away”. He is the I am; when He said “I am he, they went away backward and fell to the ground”. The Lord could have dismissed all the opposition in the power of His Person; but no, He went forth into the suffering way and all that that involved.

Some of the scriptures read speak of persons who hid themselves. The great danger is that when the call comes to be available to the Lord and His testimony we tend to hide ourselves for different reasons. Adam and his wife hid themselves because they had something on the conscience and therefore they were afraid. That might hinder any one of us. When the woman was deceived and Adam disobeyed, they acquired a conscience. By partaking of the tree they acquired the knowledge of good and evil; therefore because of their sin they were not happy with God. It says: “And they heard the voice of Jehovah Elohim, walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And Man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah Elohim, in the midst of the trees of the garden”. They hid behind the very trees which had been of God’s provision. We can hide ourselves instead of being available. The reason here was because of something on their conscience. You can understand Adam and Eve fearing the presence of God, but there is no reason why any of us should have anything on our conscience to be a hindrance to our committal to the Lord and His testimony, because there is a way in which anything on the conscience can be settled. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins”; and not only forgive our sins but “cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1: 9): to cleanse us, to justify us, to be clean and pure, and cleared of guilt. That is what God offers us in the glad tidings. So we should have nothing on our conscience. Some of us may, like Paul, have some things in our memory to keep us humble, for Paul never forgot that he had persecuted believers, but it was not on his conscience; he was free with God because he had confessed it all, he had had to do with God about it; it was no longer on his conscience, but it was in his memory to keep him humble, and some of us have things in our memory to keep us humble. But there need not be anything on anybody’s conscience. One of the gospel hymns says:

Conscience now no more condemns us

For His own most precious blood

Once for all has washed and cleansed us

Cleansed us in the sight of God.

(No 410)

Because of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ because of the work He accomplished, because of His going forth, knowing all that would come upon Him, to clear the ground so that no one, no man, or woman, or child need have anything on their conscience, we therefore need not fear the presence of God but be available for Him, for His service, for His pleasure for His will at the present moment.

Now we come to king Saul who hid himself. King Saul had been given every advantage. If you read the preceding chapters you can see how great advantages were given to him because he was called into a place of responsibility; he was selected for it and he knew he was selected for it. He was given special food by Samuel the prophet; he was given the shoulder: “And Samuel said to the cook, Bring the portion that I gave thee, of which I said to thee, Set it by thee. And the cook took up the shoulder, and what was on it, and set it before Saul”, 1 Sam 9: 23, 24. Saul had that advantage; he was given the shoulder to strengthen him for the responsibility that he was to take up. The Lord will not ask us to take up any responsibility that He would not support us in and would not give us strength for. Saul is given this special food, and then he is selected by being anointed, God even giving him another heart (see 1 Sam 10: 9); the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him, he had every advantage, and now the word comes for Saul to go forward; but what do we find? He is hiding among the baggage. Among the baggage is not a very dignified place for one who was called to a place of responsibility.

Each one of us is called to take some responsibility, we are hardly in Christian fellowship if we do not take some responsibility. It was special with king Saul, but each one of us, whether young or old, has some responsibility to fill at the present time. Saul was found hiding in the baggage and was not available when he was needed. It says: “And they sought for him, but he was not to be found”, not available at the very moment when he was needed. This is a moment when each one of us is needed to fill his or her part in the testimony and service of God. This is the time. Saul was not found, and “they inquired of Jehovah further, Will the man yet come hither? And Jehovah answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the baggage”. Saul was timid, backward, it was not true humility for true humility is not thinking of self at all. Saul was thinking about himself and therefore was not available. Imagine a man who was called upon in this way hiding himself among the baggage! He had to be fetched: “they ran and fetched him”. Now is the time for each of us to be available, now is the well-accepted time, now is the day of salvation, now is the time to commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus personally, to His testimony, to God and His service and His will. The flesh, in timidity and backwardness hindered Saul from being available when he was needed.

In chapter 13 we find an extension of this: “And the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were distressed); and the people hid themselves in caves”. These people were uncertain, and many are like this at the moment, they are not available because of uncertainty. “The people hid themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in cliffs, and in strongholds, and in pits”. There was a great variety of things in which to hide; there are a great variety of things to hide in today where there is uncertainty. Saul was uncertain himself, and to follow any man would cause uncertainty. In chapter 14 Saul said to the priest “Bring hither the ark of God” (v 18), then in the next verse “Withdraw thy hand”; he did not know what he ought to do. The people here are called men of Israel, they ought to have been confiding in God. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, prince of God, dignified person, but the men of Israel saw they were in a strait, the people were distressed, and the people hid themselves as many at the present moment are hiding themselves because of uncertainty. There is no need to be uncertain; our great Leader is to be the Lord Jesus personally, He is the great Leader; we are not to be following any human leader no matter how big he is, like Saul here who was head and shoulders above all the people and who would stand out above them all; that is not one to follow, follow the Lord Jesus.

We sometimes sing:

It is not with uncertain step

We tread our desert way;

A well-known voice has called us up

To everlasting day

(No 244)

The Lord said, Follow Me. Our salvation depends on being disciples of the Lord Jesus and following Him. As we desire to follow Him the Holy Spirit will be our support; He will help us, He will indicate the way. We need to be in dependence as to the right way at the present time. The Lord knows the right way; the Shepherd leads the flock the right way; the Spirit leads the right way: “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”, Rom 8: 14. We need to be led by the Good Shepherd, led by the Spirit, so that there is no uncertainty. Let us thus commit ourselves. The men of Israel hid themselves in caves (natural caves, I suppose), in thickets; cliffs would be high places; and strongholds (it is very difficult to reach persons who are in strongholds); and some were hiding themselves in pits. We are in times when many are hiding themselves, not available but hiding themselves because of uncertainty. Let none of us be uncertain.

Isaiah was available here in chapter 6. It begins: “In the year of the death of king Uzziah, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple”. He had a view of something going on normally. It was the year of the death of king Uzziah who had been presumptuous and therefore a leper, but now Isaiah had another view; “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Seraphim were standing above him: each had six wings; with twain he covered his face and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he flew”. This is the kind of spirit, and these are the features we need to desire to have, not hiding in thickets and caves and strongholds. They had six wings, with two to cover the face, with two they covered the feet; they are not advertising their movements, they are not making themselves prominent, but they are able to fly, with two they flew, and they would not fly with any uncertainty, they would move with certainty under the Lord’s direction. O, to be like one of these Seraphim! “And one called to the other and said, Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” Would there be such a thing as this going on at the present time? Would there be persons like this on the earth at the present time? If there are I would like to be among them. This is true humility; this is not thinking of self at all, it is not the backwardness of the flesh, but covering the face and covering the feet, all to exalt the Lord who is high and lifted up. “And one called to the other and said, Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory! And the foundations of the thresholds shook”. And Isaiah said “Woe unto me! for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips”. He was impressed by what he saw, by a service going on acceptable to God, in principle under the Lord Jesus in the power of the Spirit. As soon as he says “Woe unto me! for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ... one of the seraphim flew unto me, and he had in his hand a glowing coal ... and he made it touch my mouth, and said, Behold, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin expiated”. Isaiah had right desires to have part in this service and he is made suitable. So the call comes; the Lord says “Whom shall I send ...?” That is what the Lord is saying at the present time; who is going to be available for what He has in mind? It is not what Isaiah had in mind, or what any one of us has in mind, but what the Lord has in mind. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And I said, Here am I”. I wonder if we are all saying, Here am I, send me. The emphasis is on *send* not on me—*send* me. O, what a privilege it is to be sent, not undertaking anything on our own initiative but under the Lord’s initiative to be sent, to act under Him, to have part with Him and in His testimony. May every one of us be available for this!

Isaiah was sent to a very difficult people, as the chapter indicates: “Go; and thou shalt say unto this people, Hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive”; their heart was fat, their ears heavy, their eyes blind, but the chapter goes on to speak of a tenth part, and that tenth part goes through great testing; it is eaten, but what remains is the trunk: “as the terebinth and as the oak whose trunk remaineth after the felling: the holy seed shall be the trunk thereof”. We are in the days, dear brethren, of remnant conditions; we have to work with a few available, but let us be among the remaining after the felling: “the holy seed shall be the trunk thereof”. There is to be fruit and the pleasure of the Lord sustained in a few, as Isaiah had part in the testimony in smallness and remnant conditions, but under the Lord and for His pleasure. May we all be available! May we all be ready to say, Here am I, in view of the Lord’s appeal to us now, and be assured of the Holy Spirit’s support in this great work that is going on at the present time, a day of small things publicly but a day of great things in this time of the finishing touches of the Spirit to His nearly two thousand years of assembly formation. May we have part in it for His Name’s sake.

**CHRISTCHURCH NZ**

**26th May 1984**

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# THE LORD LOOKING

**John 1: 40-42; Mark 10: 20-27; Luke 22: 60-62**

I would like first of all to give each one here some idea of God’s purpose in the preaching. For nearly twenty centuries there has been the preaching of the word of God; it began at Pentecost with Peter nearly two thousand years ago and has gone on ever since. What is God’s purpose in the preaching? What is God’s purpose for us here as gathered? God has in mind to make us happy, satisfied, to give us a knowledge of Himself, to have us in communion and intimacy with Him, to be conscious of being loved by Him and to respond to His love. God has the very best in mind for each one of us. He would have us brought into His kingdom, forming part of His house where He dwells. He would have us satisfied individually and linked on with other satisfied persons serving Him. God proposes in the gospel that we should be committed to His will. God can do far better for us than we can do for ourselves. God’s catering for our happiness is far beyond any catering we can do for our happiness. God has the very best in mind; the very best that God’s heart could devise in His love and power and wisdom is available to us in the glad tidings now; even to form part of the first of all the families, the nearest to God eternally of all the families. This is some idea of what God has in mind in the preaching of the gospel.

The gospel is preached to sinners who are far from Him, but God has made provision for that matter to be settled immediately. The matter of your sins, of your guilt, stands in the way, but God does not begin by telling us we are sinners. When the Lord approached that woman at the well of Sychar He did not begin by asking for her husband; He did not begin by reminding her of what a sinner she was; He says “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water”, John 4: 10. He secured her interest in the divine blessings that God has in mind, and when she asked for the living water, then He says “Go, call thy husband, and come here”. The first thing He did was not to raise the moral question; the first thing He did was to attract her by the greatness of what God had in mind for her, and then He raised the moral question, and it is easily solved when we are attracted by the great blessings that God has in mind for us. We are sinners; it is a step in the right direction when we realise that we are lost, guilty, hell-deserving sinners; that is the first and most important step towards coming into the bounty and blessings that God has in mind for us. When we own our true state before God in repentance, He points us to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His finished work with which God has been so satisfied that for two thousand years He has been offering forgiveness to every repentant sinner no matter what a sinner he has been. Murder is one of the grossest sins we could think of, but persons who have committed murder have been converted, have been forgiven, have been justified, as clear of guilt. That is the gospel, that is what God has in mind for the guiltiest of sinners. What a wonderful message the preacher has to present! What wonderful blessings God has in mind for us! He would have us secured for His will and His pleasure. Just think of the blessedness of being here for God’s pleasure, of being conscious of being here for God’s pleasure; that is not beyond anyone here, that is what God proposes in the glad tidings.

It has cost much; it has not been without infinite cost to our Lord Jesus Christ; He undertook the work, the suffering, being forsaken of God, entering into death itself, pouring out His precious blood, going into the grave. Think of what that cost the Lord Jesus! It has not been without infinite cost that such glad tidings should be proclaimed, that God should make such blessed proposals in the gospel; it has not been without tremendous cost. To make light of what has cost God so much is an insult to God. When the message went out in the parable to persons invited when the king made a feast, it says “they made light of it” (Matt 22: 5); think of making light of what has cost so much; how offensive to God to make light of, not to regard seriously, what God is saying in the glad tidings. I am endeavouring to give some impression of what God has in mind to secure through the preaching of the gospel—to set us up for His will and to give us the Spirit to fulfil His will. God wants us for His will, and He gives us His Spirit that we might fulfil His will; not only fulfil His will under obligation but loving to do His will, to delight in the will of God; that is what God proposes to give us, a heart like that, to give us desires like that. God intends to reach our hearts by means of the glad tidings, not only our minds. He will reason, if reason is necessary, because the most reasonable proposition in this world is what is proposed in the glad tidings; “Come now, let us reason together, saith Jehovah”, Isa 1: 18. Paul entered the synagogue at Thessalonica and reasoned with persons, see Acts 17: 2. There is nothing more reasonable than God’s proposals in the glad tidings. I wonder if we are all sufficiently interested in God’s proposals.

I have read these scriptures which speak of the Lord looking, looking on persons; that is the Lord’s attitude tonight. As we are met here let us be conscious that we are under the Lord’s look; He is looking upon each one of us. There is something about a gospel preaching, where God is speaking and the Spirit is active, that would give us to be conscious of the Lord not only looking upon us but looking into our hearts. He knows the very secrets of our motives and our thoughts; the Lord is looking upon each one of us now. We began with Peter. It says “Jesus looking at him”: that was a look of interest, of special interest in Peter. The Lord would look with a look of interest on each person here. He is interested in you. He looked at Peter as a potential for God’s pleasure and for God’s service, because it says, “Jesus looking at him said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas; thou shalt be called Cephas (which interpreted is stone)”. There is no indication of Peter being committed here, of Peter saying anything, he is just under the Lord’s interested gaze as a likely person, as potential for what God has in mind. ‘Stone’ would refer not only to what is individual, for Peter himself speaks later about being built up a spiritual house to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, see 1 Pet 2: 5. This is what the Lord had in mind, and what He has in mind for every one of us here, consciously to form part of His house, His dwelling place where He is known and served. The Lord looked with intense interest at Peter—the note indicates ‘looking carefully’. The Lord looked carefully at Peter with intense interest as He would look with intense interest on each one here as potential for what He has in mind in regard to God’s house, God’s will, God’s pleasure, God’s service. Peter makes no response here although he must have been conscious of being under the Lord’s interested gaze. We would have to go elsewhere to find any response on the part of Peter. In Luke 5 the Lord went into the synagogue, I suppose the local synagogue, and Peter was apparently unaffected, and then He went into Peter’s house where his mother-in-law lay in a fever; the Lord healed her and still Peter does not seem to be affected; but when the Lord came nearer still and into his boat, as near as He could to him, Peter was affected; he said “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord”, v 5. He owned he was a sinner and became a follower of the Lord Jesus; he began to answer to the Lord’s looking on him interestedly as potential. The Lord would view each one here as potential in view of being for God’s will and pleasure and having part in His service, and being part of His house. Men do not make stones, it is God’s work; it is a question of what God is doing. Peter became a follower of the Lord Jesus, he became a learner in view of filling his part in the spiritual house of which Peter himself tells us later in his first epistle. He speaks of the “living stone”, Christ, and of “living stones”, believers, being built up into a spiritual house. That is God’s mind for us in the glad tidings. I would like each one of us to be conscious of the Lord looking on us, looking at you, dear friend, looking at me, in view of potential, for all that God has in mind.

In the gospel of Mark we find the Lord looking on a man who is self-righteous. He seemed interested; he asked: “what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”, v 17. He was outwardly upright but had his own ideas. It says: “Jesus looking upon him loved him”. This was a look not only of interest but a look of love. I would say to each one here that not only is the Lord looking upon you with interest but He is looking upon you with affection. “Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, One thing lackest thou”. There was one thing which prevented this man from coming into the blessing of serving God, of having part in a spiritual house to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Think of the blessedness of having part in response that is acceptable to God! One thing hindered this man: “One thing lackest thou”. How very solemn if this man was not blessed because of one thing! Would one thing hinder anyone here I wonder? If there is one thing, friend, the Lord knows what it is, and you would know what it is; the preacher would not know but you would know. Is there one thing preventing you from coming into the fulness of what God has in mind for you? “Jesus looking upon him loved him”; this man turned away from that look of love: how solemn! Divine love was towards that man, divine appeal was there: “looking upon him loved him”, and he turned away from it. He went away sorrowful. He might have followed Jesus joyfully. Many in the gospels glorified God, “But he, sad at the word, went away grieved”, because he did not face the one thing that the Lord knew about and that he knew about. How solemn that one thing hindered this man! Then “Jesus looking around says to his disciples, How difficultly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” With this man there was this one thing; would there be any other things that hindered others? Dear friend, the one thing that hinders you might not be the one thing that hinders me, or the one thing that hinders anybody else. The one thing might be peculiar to you as it was with this man here: “One thing lackest thou”; but “Jesus looking around says to his disciples”; would another thing hinder another one? Then He says “Children, how difficult it is that those who trust in riches”; how difficult it is for persons who trust in anything else but the Lord Jesus, who trust in any other one but God. How difficult it is! But how simple, how blessed, to trust in God! “Blessed are all who have their trust in him”, Ps 2: 12. That psalm says, “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way”. That refers to the world to come, when the nations will come and own allegiance to the Son, but the psalm ends; “Blessed are all who have their trust in him”. That applies now, all who have their trust in the Lord Jesus, the One who will publicly reign, the One to whom all the nations will own their allegiance; they will have to, it will be compulsory, but now there is the appeal of love: “Jesus looking on him loved him”. Jesus is looking on you, dear friend, loves you, that one thing may not hinder you, that you may trust in Him and come into the fulness of the blessing of the glad tidings. It says “they were exceedingly astonished, saying to one another, And who can be saved? But Jesus looking on them says, With men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God”. That one thing may be impossible as far as you are concerned; that one thing may be so part of you that it appears impossible, but it is not impossible with God; it is not impossible with His help; it is not impossible with the grace of the Lord Jesus; it is not impossible with the power of the Holy Spirit, “for all things are possible with God”. It says, “Jesus looking on them says”. He would look on us, this company here, and He would say it is not impossible. It might seem insurmountable, dear friend, to you, but it is not with God; there is power with Him, there is grace with Him. Remember He is looking upon you, loving you in view of His appeal having effect, and that you might be committed to Him as these disciples were.

In Mark 11 the Lord looked round on all things: “he entered into Jerusalem and into the temple; and having looked round on all things”, v 11. The Lord is taking account of all that is going on, especially in Christendom, the Lord is looking and surveying all; this is a look of scrutiny; nothing escapes His scrutiny. There is a look of interest in Peter in John 1; there is a look of affection for this man in Mark 10; there is also this scrutiny, you cannot keep anything from Him.

Then in the scripture in Luke the Lord, turning round, looked at Peter. He had been a follower who really loved the Lord Jesus but he got himself into a difficult situation which he was not able for, into company that he was not able for; he was warming himself at the fire where the soldiers were; he was among them and he sinned, he denied the Lord. “Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he was yet speaking, the cock crew. And the Lord, turning round, looked at Peter”. The Lord is able to make things coincide. There was Peter active in this departure from the Lord, and there was a cock crowing and the Lord looked at him at the same time. He is able to make circumstances coincide in order that there may be a result for Him. It says, ‘the Lord’, that was Peter’s Lord, the One whom the believer owns as Lord. Very often the gospel writers record what Jesus did but here the Lord is spoken of: “And the Lord, turning round, looked at Peter”. I wonder what kind of look that was? It would certainly be a look of interest; it would certainly be a look of affection sufficient to be a rebuke. Peter remembered the word of the Lord; He was deeply affected. It may be that the Lord is looking at some one here. “The Lord turning round”, it says, “looked at Peter”. There certainly was love there because the Lord had previously prayed for him, the Lord knew what was going to happen. “The Lord said Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat” - that was the whole company - “but *I* have besought for thee that thy faith fail not”, vv 31, 32. Simon Peter who was about to fail was the subject of the intercession, the personal intercession of the Lord Himself. Dear fellow believer, you are the subject of the personal intercession of the Lord Jesus; He is Priest on high and He is Patron or Advocate, taking account of you. He knew beforehand what Peter was going to do; Peter did not believe it in his thinking of self. He failed miserably, but “the Lord, turning round looked at Peter”. What that look conveyed to Peter! The poetess speaks of the look that melted Peter; it melted him; the cock crowing and the Lord’s look coincided just at the very moment of Peter’s greatest need. The Lord is perhaps looking at some one here who has departed; we can all depart but the Lord never takes His eye off us. He looked at Peter; again the word means looked carefully; He looked intently, purposefully, interestedly and affectionately; “and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he said to him, Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice”. The cock crowing was circumstantial, but the Lord’s look was not circumstantial, it was direct and purposeful, and there was a result. It says “And Peter, going forth without, wept bitterly”. He had failed the Lord, and we have all failed the Lord at some time, but the Lord has not failed us and never will fail us. Each believer is the subject of the personal intercession of the Lord Jesus; He will never fail us even if we have failed Him, but He would look carefully, even now, that we might be recovered, that we might repent. The Lord is looking in order that there may be repentance, a change of mind, a change of heart, that He may have His full place with us, and that the potential that the Lord saw in Peter in John 1 might be fully realised in each one of us. It was fully realised with Peter for He served in the power of the Holy Spirit for God’s will and pleasure. Peter was recovered and speaks later of a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, of which he was part and he encourages others to come into it. I trust each one of us will be encouraged to come into the fulness of what God has in mind. I would like to be assured that no one here misses what God has in mind. It is my responsibility at least to endeavour to give some impression of what God has in mind for each of us. May each one answer to it for His Name’s sake.

**CHRISTCHURCH NZ**

**27th May 1984**

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# OCCUPATION WITH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

**Matthew 21: 1-10; Luke 7: 47-49; 8: 22-25; 12: 40-44**

I would just like to call attention to our Lord Jesus Christ from these scriptures. He is to be the blessed occupation of our hearts, and to be our great object in life down here. We were reading about the thoughts and intents of the heart, and our thoughts are to be towards Him and our intents, intentions ought to be what is for Him, for His glory, for His pleasure; and for the advancement of His interests, the expanding of His interests down here as far as we are able.

So this first scripture describes the coming of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem, where God rendered testimony to who was there. It is a kind of foreshadowing of what will yet take place actually when the Lord comes to reign; when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. That is about to take place, He is coming to reign. Here He comes to die. Jerusalem in this gospel is opposed to the Lord Jesus, although it is called the city of the great King, but this passage gives testimony to what will yet take place. God did not have His beloved Son, although He was rejected, come into Jerusalem without some testimony being rendered as to who He was. So that is our privilege now; ere the Lord Jesus comes to reign publicly, it is our privilege to have Him reigning in our hearts, ascribing to Him worthiness and the glory that belongs to Him at the present time. It says here, “the whole city was moved”, it is quite a remarkable expression, “saying, Who is this?” Who is so great as to cause all this testimony to be rendered, as He entered into Jerusalem?

It was only momentary in this city, it goes on to speak about the children crying in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Matthew 21: 15). The Pharisees were indignant, but they could not do a thing about it; the Lord says, “Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?” (Matt 21: 16). It is good to look forward, it helps us in testimony, to look forward to the time when the Lord will come in publicly, because all testimony to Him has that in view. In our lives, in our allegiance to Him, we are only rendering testimony to what is yet to be public, the great moment when the Lord Jesus will take over His inheritance. All things belong to Him. He is the Heir of all things. He has not yet taken over His inheritance, but He is about to, and it is good to realise that any testimony we render at the moment is testimony to what will yet be public when the Lord Jesus comes. It heartens us because we may meet with opposition and reproach, and not much reception; but just let us bear in mind that what we are giving testimony to is what will yet happen publicly in this very world in which we are. He will transform this world by means of judgment. The gospel is not going to convert the world, the world is not going to improve by the preaching of the gospel; the world itself is not but individuals are going to be secured to have part in this testimony that meantime is being rendered. The writer quotes, “Behold thy King cometh to thee, meek, and mounted upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass”. It will yet be true, as I have said.

Psalm 24 says, “Lift up your heads, ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in”, v 7. That will be actual, it will actually happen in this world. The question is raised in that psalm—“Who is this King of glory? Jehovah strong and mighty, Jehovah mighty in battle”, v 8. He is going to prove Himself mighty in battle, overcoming every enemy; every enemy is going to be overcome, all opposition will be subdued, and the King of glory will yet come in. It heartens us to be assured that this moment is going to arrive. The section from Psalm 93 to Psalm 100 is a section by itself and is worthwhile reading. These psalms speak of Jehovah reigning; it is the Lord coming in, coming in to His own. Psalm 93 says, “Jehovah reigneth, he hath clothed himself with majesty: Jehovah hath clothed himself, he hath girded himself with strength”, v 1. Then we have in Psalm 97, “Jehovah reigneth: let the earth be glad, let the many isles rejoice” (v 1); and in Psalm 99, “Jehovah reigneth: let the peoples tremble. He sitteth between the cherubim: let the earth be moved”, v 1. Psalm 100 is the conclusion of that section, when the Lord will have actually arrived as King and been publicly acknowledged. In the testimony we render now, whether it is in the preaching, open air preaching, or speaking to individual souls, or, what may be as important as anything, in our individual lives, we are bearing testimony to the fact that the Lord Jesus is yet going to come publicly. As we have been taught, any testimony now has in view the day of display when the Lord Jesus will reign.

As He entered into Jerusalem, the whole city was moved, saying, “Who is this?” He will come to be wondered at in all that believe; what a day that will be! It is the great hope of our hearts! The hope of our hearts of course, the hope of the church, is the actual coming of the Lord at the rapture, but that has in view His public appearing. Let us have heart in the testimony now because any allegiance to Him, any place He has in our hearts as individuals, is testimony to what will yet be seen universally. God will see to it! God saw to it that there was testimony rendered in this city of Jerusalem. In spite of all the opposition, there was the multitude praising and casting their garments before the Lord Jesus, the meek and lowly One. So as He actually entered Jerusalem in His pathway here, we can be assured that the Lord Jesus will come publicly into His own.

Now in Luke 7 we have the question asked, “Who is this who forgives also sins?” Now at the present moment the Lord is forgiving sins. He is the One who is coming to reign; the One who is coming to deal with every enemy. In that section of the Psalms, from 93 to 100, it speaks of “O God of vengeances” (Ps 94: 1), the Lord is going to take vengeance, it is right that it should be so; dealing in unsparing judgment with every opposition. Meantime He is the One who forgives sins. What a blessed thing to know the Lord Jesus as the One who forgives sins. This woman in Luke 7 knew what it was to have her sins forgiven. That is a great matter! It is a great matter, to be known not only once and for all, when we have to do with the Lord Jesus, when we come to know Him and commit ourselves to Him, and know our sins forgiven, for we often sin afterwards; we sin much after we have been converted. He is the One who forgives sins. He is in that forgiving attitude. The work, the righteous work has been accomplished, as we often say in the glad tidings, and need to repeat over and over again. That work was undertaken by Him at such cost to Himself and He is the One who characteristically forgives sins. What a matter that is to know Jesus as the One who forgives sins, whatever the sins may be.

We were speaking about our hearts being searched, searched by the Spirit, searched by the word of God. That searching may discover some things that are wrong, some things that have been done that have not been right; whether things individually, things in our households, or maybe things amongst us locally have been done that could not stand the light. Jesus is the One who forgives sins as we have to do with Him about these things. He forgives sins. He has a forgiving attitude. What an encouragement therefore to invite His searching, and in the searching to be searched by Him as to anything that has not been right. He would not hold anything against us. He is ready to forgive; but then, they have to be confessed you see as this woman did. She was a sinner, and knew she was a sinner. She must have had some searching of conscience, she must have been searched, she took the place of being a sinner, and came at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears. Her whole being was moved in appreciation of this One who forgives sins. It is the critics who say, “Who is this who forgives also sins?” He said to the Pharisee, “Her many sins are forgiven”. Then He said to the woman, “Thy sins are forgiven”. So that she would have nothing at all on her conscience, nothing that she has done because she has been searched in that way. We could not be consciously in the presence of Jesus without being searched, but then He is the One who forgives sins.

There is a way, dear brethren, of getting every matter put right; no matter what it is, there is a way of getting every matter put right. Some of us have been involved in wrong things and have been under wrong influence, but we are responsible for being under wrong influence. We have had to face these things but we have found the One who forgives sins; it is His present attitude. He is the One who forgives sins, it is good that we should all appreciate the Lord Jesus as the One who forgives sins. “Who is this”, they say, “who forgives also sins?” Then He said to the woman, “Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace”. He is the One who forgives sins, it is the present attitude of the Lord Jesus. Let us all take advantage of it. The Saviour is not only for unbelievers, the One who forgives sins is for believers too; so there would be nothing outstanding. This woman went in peace with nothing outstanding. The searching we have spoken of would be in view of every matter being settled, nothing outstanding, but every matter being settled. “Who is this who forgives also sins?” It is characteristic, it is His present attitude to forgive sins; no matter what it is you have done. He is in a forgiving attitude.

In the next scripture we read we have, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?” These persons were astonished, they were His own disciples. He was in the ship with His disciples. He left the direction of the ship to them apparently because it says, “he fell asleep”; that is like the situation at the present time, the Lord leaves things in our hands, our localities, the Lord leaves things with us, He is absent. It says, “*he* entered into a ship, himself and his disciples; and he said to them, Let us pass over to the other side of the lake; and they set off from shore”, that is He initiates this movement, “And as they sailed, he fell asleep”. Now that is the situation. We are set in localities, whether we are many or few, and the Lord leaves things in our hands as with the disciples here.

Then it says, “And as they sailed, he fell asleep; and a sudden squall of wind came down on the lake”. That sometimes happens, a sudden squall of wind. Other incidents speak of the wind being contrary, and that is true also. If we are set in responsibility, if the Lord puts us in a position of responsibility the wind is always contrary; the enemy is always opposed, he never lets up, as we were reminded he is attacking on all fronts. That is constant, there is a constant contrary wind; but here it is a sudden squall of wind, an unexpectedly sudden squall, and that happens too. It says, “they were filled with water, and were in danger”. This is Luke’s account of it, they were in danger. Then, “coming to him they woke him up, saying, Master, master, we perish”. But what they come to is astonishment, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?” It is good to be reminded that the Lord is always in charge, and the Lord is able for every situation no matter what arises, no matter how sudden or severe the squall is. There will be squalls as long as we are here. This is the attack of the enemy, the winds would suggest that; the wind would suggest the source of this squall, and the water would be the disturbing results. “But he, rising up, rebuked the wind and the raging of the water; and they ceased, and there was a calm”.

It is good, dear brethren, to be confident of this, that there is One who is able for every situation whatever may arise in our local settings. This is like a locality here, they were in a right ship, the Lord had set this movement on. Just as when we begin to break bread in a place, provided it is under the Lord’s direction, something is established for Him, and He leaves us to work things out. If we have established a breaking of bread in a place, and are assured that it is under the Lord’s direction, He would leave things to us. On the one hand the wind is always contrary, there is always the constant opposition of the enemy, but also, sometimes, there are sudden squalls of wind, certain times when the enemy appears in a sudden and violent way. It is good to know that there is One who commands even the winds and the water and they obey Him. There is One who is in control. He was asleep, that is He was not active, but He was, nevertheless, in control. The Lord is absent, and leaves things with us, nevertheless, He is in control. They say, “Master” here; that word Master is interesting, it is One who is over others, One who is in control. So it says, “And, being afraid, they were astonished, saying to one another, Who then is this ...?”

It is good to be increased in our appreciation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who forgives sins. How wonderful to get to know One who has this constant attitude of forgiving sins! As they are confessed sins, we would know forgiveness as this woman did here, because He said to her, “Thy sins are forgiven”. That is, she had the assurance that her sins were forgiven. He is the One who forgives sins. He is the One who commands, the One who commands the winds and the water, the One who is in control in every situation. The Lord came to them when the wind was contrary, that is in other parables where the wind was consistently contrary, the Lord came to them. But here they woke Him up, and He intervenes in the situation. I thought these exclamations regarding the Lord Jesus would be for our encouragement in our local settings, because we need encouragement.

There is always the wind contrary, and sometimes there are these sudden attempts of the enemy to overthrow, to fill with water, to sink the ship, to frustrate what the Lord sets on. The enemy will try this over and over again, but this exclamation is “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?”

Now in Luke 12, it is again a matter that we work out in localities. The Lord says, “Fear not, little flock, for it has been the good pleasure of your Father to give you the kingdom”, Luke 12: 32. It suggests defenceless persons here in dependence upon God. Then verse 35, “Let your loins be girded about, and lamps burning”, that is the testimony in the absence of our Lord Jesus Christ; then “and *ye* like men who wait their own lord ... that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately”. That may refer to the Lord’s coming for us, but I would think it refers more to the Lord being prepared to come into our circumstances, come into our localities, for our cheer and encouragement, because it says, “Blessed are those bondmen whom the Lord on coming shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he will gird himself and make them recline at table, and coming up will serve them”. Then it says, “And if he come in the second watch, and come in the third watch, and find them thus, blessed are those bondmen”. It does not say, If He come in the second watch, *or* come in the third watch. He may come in both. It shows how ready the Lord is to come near to us, to make His presence known, if only we were ready to open to Him. It says, in verse 36, “whenever he may leave the wedding, that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately”. The Lord would come to us often, come to us in our gatherings, make Himself known. He would be pleased to do that. Maybe sometimes we are not ready to recognise the Lord coming in and helping and supporting. May we know more of it, that when he comes and knocks, we may open to him immediately. This might be more difficult in some of the localities where we have larger numbers because we tend to be more active in the readings for instance, we tend sometimes to be very active, and maybe sometimes the Lord does not get in; whereas in smaller localities there may be more need, and more experience of dependence, of the Lord coming in and helping us. So it says, “if he come in the second watch, and come in the third watch”, not or but “and”; that means the Lord would come to us often. We would desire, would we not, that when He comes and knocks we may be ready to open to Him immediately. In the Laodicean epistle the Lord says, “Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking; if any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me”, Rev 3: 20. The Lord would be greatly desirous of coming into all our occasions. We therefore need to be ready, as it says in verse 40, “And ye therefore, be ye ready”.

Then Peter said, “Lord, sayest thou this parable to us, or also to all?” And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and prudent steward ...?” What is needed, dear brethren, is faithfulness and prudence and wisdom. “Who then ...?”, the Lord said; it is a challenge to us I think. Who will answer to this exercise to be faithful and prudent?—“Who then is the faithful and prudent steward, whom his lord will set over his household, to give the measure of corn in season?” This is the great subject of food, the need for food in our localities. There is a need, of course, of teaching, there is a need of teaching; but maybe there is not the same lack of teaching as there is of food; what is needed is food “to give the measure of corn in season”, food in its season. How important that is, no matter what the season is! We were reading earlier about grace for seasonable help, seasonable, whatever the season may be; sometimes we need more help than others, so it is grace for seasonable help. Here it is, the measure of corn in season. There is a great need for the maintenance of the supply of food. The food would be Christ, the presentation of Christ to our affections; because it would be food for our affections, not only food for our minds but food for our hearts, to strengthen us in having the Lord Jesus Himself as our great Object. We need food to be maintained in that attitude, and the Lord looks to some among His own to provide this food. “Blessed is that bondman whom his lord on coming shall find doing thus”.

May we answer to this exercise as to food. Did not the Lord say to Peter, recovered Peter at the end of John 21, “Feed my lambs”, John 21: 15? How important that is! That would be young people that they may be fed, householdly and in the local gathering, “Feed my lambs”. The Lord commissioned Peter to do it, and this faithful and prudent steward would have in mind to feed young people that belong to the Lord. We would like to see our young people being preserved and protected, and built up, especially as to what they have to face in the world around us. Then He says to Peter, “Shepherd my sheep” (John 21: 16) and “Feed my sheep”, John 21: 17. That was the Lord’s commission to Peter in this appendix to John’s gospel (John 21), which relates very much to our own time.

So the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and prudent steward ...?” that is what the Lord said, Who is he? There would be such here I am sure, and such need to be encouraged to continue in this work of giving the measure of corn in season; the measure in its season, that is, just sufficient for each day or each occasion of gathering, just enough day by day, week by week, the measure of corn in season. Because we can only appropriate so much, it is a measured quantity, it is sufficient for the maintenance of the household, “Who then is the faithful and prudent steward, whom his lord will set over his household ...?” This is not a matter of mere knowledge or being able to speak about things, but it is being able to maintain the food supply in season.

May the Lord encourage us, first of all to realise that any testimony we render, by what we say, or possibly more important by what we are, especially as loyal to the Lord Jesus in the time of His absence, has in view the great day of display, when the Lord will actually be universally acknowledged. I think we should delight to think of that. The day is soon coming when He is actually going to be universally acknowledged; none will say, no one will say to his brother, know ye the Lord for all shall know Him; the knowledge of the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. What a day that is that is coming! I think it would lift up our hearts and encourage us. Then may we be helped to appreciate more the One who consistently forgives sins, encouraging us to invite all the searching that is needed in view of knowing what forgiveness is, and also the One who commands the very elements that are opposed to us; He commands them, commands the winds and the water and they obey Him. He allows certain things to happen that we might the more appreciate Him as the One who commands all. Finally may He help us to take up the privilege and responsibility of providing food in our households and in our local settings, for His glory.

**BENDIGO**

**5th June 1984**

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# PERSONS WHO ARE BLESSED

**Isaiah 30: 18; 32: 20**

Certain persons throughout Scripture are said to be blessed. The Lord Himself in Matthew 5 spoke of such, beginning with “Blessed are the poor in spirit”. Persons who are blessed would be those whom the Lord is pleased with, who have His approval; we would desire to be among them. Psalm 2 says, “Blessed are all who have their trust in him”, v 12. That is very simple, but very blessed, consistently to have our trust in Him. We were noticing recently that the Ephesians began by trusting in the Lord Jesus (Eph 1: 13), which is a sound foundation in the soul on which to rest and grow in the knowledge of God. The last verse of Psalm 2 says, “Kiss the Son”, which refers to the time when every nation will have to pay tribute to the Lord Jesus in His pre-eminence in the world to come, but the last words are, “Blessed are all who have their trust in him”, which has its application at the present moment, a time of faith. It will not be a time of faith when the Lord establishes the kingdom publicly, it will be a time of sight and of universal recognition of His lordship; but now is the time of faith, so that young people here, and all of us, can begin and be consistent in our trust in Him, not trusting in man, but just trusting in the Lord Jesus. In Isaiah 30 it says, “blessed are all they that wait for him”. This is a very fine section of Isaiah which begins in chapter 30 and ends in chapter 32. It is spoken to a rebellious people but the prophet commends waiting for Him. We are in a waiting time, waiting for the Lord Jesus to come, and the waiting time is very valuable because it is a time in which we grow, a time in which we gain knowledge of God. The Lord is waiting Himself. Paul speaks about the patience of the Christ, 2 Thess 3: 5. The Lord is patiently waiting and it becomes us to wait for Him; wait expectantly, every day looking for Him. That would adjust our committals and our dealings on this earth. Then we need to wait for Him to come into matters which cause concern and difficulty. This attitude is very pleasing to the Lord. It is a blessed attitude. Paul refers in Romans 4: 6 to David describing the blessedness of a man. There is a blessedness attached to certain attitudes on our part.

It says in verse 15 of Isaiah 30, “For thus saith the Lord Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved”. We would like to preach that gospel to persons who need to return to honour the Lord, to return to those who desire to walk in the truth. “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength”. May every one of us desire to have this attitude. We tend to be agitated, but this is the blessed state described here of those who trust in Him. Verse 18 says, “And therefore will Jehovah wait, that he may be gracious unto you”. The Lord is waiting to be gracious to us, just to show His grace to any one who is returning and is in rest and quietness and confidence. “And therefore will Jehovah wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he lift himself up, that he may have mercy upon you”. We can experience something of this in returning and resting. This is a fine expression— “therefore will he lift himself up, that he may have mercy upon you ... blessed are all they that wait for him”.

This verse in Isaiah 32 comes in at the very end of this section. Isaiah 32: 1 brings in “a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment”, which describes the blessedness of the world to come about to be introduced, but the last verse says, “Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters”.

Our brother has spoken of the importance of sowing. We are all sowing some kind of seed which will have its fruit. Perhaps in years hence we may regret what we sowed, because we will be sure to reap a crop according to what we have sown. Sow what is good beside all waters. Take advantage of every suitable opportunity. Galatians speaks of sowing to the Spirit (Gal 6: 8), that would mean sowing in such a way that there would be a spiritual result. The fruit of the Spirit is spoken of in that epistle. Let us take advantage of every opportunity, whether it be in the glad tidings, the reading of the Scriptures, reading ministry, or taking time to consider the things of God—“Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth the feet of the ox and the ass”. The ox has a steady, patient, reliable and consistent tread. In undertaking any labour, the ox is dependable. How much that is needed in our local settings—dependability, steadiness, stability—the feet of the ox. Then the ass is the burden bearer. There are burdens to bear in our localities. The ass is the willing burden bearer, a domesticated, noble, useful animal. We need both the steadiness and reliability of the ox, and the willingness to carry and take responsibility in burdens that need to be carried. This has a blessedness attached to it.

May we be encouraged to take on this blessed occupation that the Lord would approve of and that God could find pleasure in, that there may be fruit for God, and we would thus have our own happy, satisfying portion. May it be so for His Name’s sake.

**MELBOURNE**

**19th June 1984**

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# BABES AS PRESENTED IN SCRIPTURE

**Luke 10: 21-24**

**1 Peter 2: 1-5**

**1 Corinthians 3: 1-3**

**Hebrews 5: 12-14; 6: 1 (to “growth”)**

These scriptures speak of babes. The first two refer to babes in the sense of what is commendable, the kind of state the Lord would look for in each one of us. The second two scriptures look at babes as immature and not commendable. This first scripture in Luke 10 is parallel to Matthew 11, at the time of the Lord’s rejection, when He reproaches these localities, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. He had been ministering in these cities and they had not repented. Although, before the Lord pronounces woe to these localities, He had secured a remnant from them, because Peter and Andrew and Philip all belonged to Bethsaida according to John 1; and there was the centurion of Capernaum who had great faith, of whom the Lord says, “Not even in Israel have I found so great faith”, Matt 8: 10 and Luke 7: 9. So the Lord had secured a remnant from these localities just as at the present time the Lord is securing persons in localities. He brings His woe to these places, just as Christendom is doomed for judgment; but before the Lord comes in in judgment He secures persons such as ourselves, unlikely persons. He secures such for Him and for the will of God. Then the Lord sends out these seventy in this same chapter. On their return they seem to be pleased with their service, but the Lord says to them, “Yet in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subjected to you, but rejoice that your names are written in the heavens”, Luke 10: 20. So heaven comes into view from this chapter onwards in the gospel of Luke.

Now what I want to come to is this, “In the same hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit”. He did not rejoice in the fact that these cities were doomed for judgment. History records how these places were devastated by the Roman power; they were about to fall when the Lord pronounces woe on them, but that did not give the Lord rejoicing. It says of His rejoicing, “in the same hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes”. The Lord rejoiced in persons being secured for Himself and for the Father. He calls them babes in contrast to the wise and prudent. The big religious men, men of note in His day, just as men of note in our day with their titles, miss all this. The Lord says, “I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth”. The Father is supreme in the divine economy. He is supreme over all the operations, over all the nations. The Father is in this place of supremacy. He is over all, and the Lord recognises Him as that, “Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth”. It calls attention to His supremacy and to His sovereignty. The Father is sovereign in the selections He makes, “thou hast hid these things from wise and prudent”, men of ability, mental capacity, education and all that kind of thing. It does not help in the things of the Lord. It can be a hindrance to be wise and prudent according to men; “thou hast hid these things from wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes”.

Now this is a good state, babes in a right sense, babes who depend on Christ, who have answered to His call, who are simple in their relations with the Lord Jesus and simple in their relations with God. These are the babes who are spoken of here. It is not a state that we have to grow from exactly. As long as we are here we are to have this babe-like attitude which the Lord has so much pleasure in. He praises the Father, having in mind these babes, that is, persons who are simple in their attachment to the Lord Jesus, simple in their relations with the Father in prayer and dependence, and simple in their relations with the Holy Spirit. Such are the babes of the present time, and the Lord delights in these persons. They are the kind of persons for whom He thanks the Father. You think of the Father’s supremacy, you think of His rights to select and to choose, and He has hid things from certain persons. The things of God are hidden from the intrusion of mere human ability and education. But He says, “hast revealed them to babes: yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in thy sight”. This is the Father’s pleasure. It is the Father’s well-pleasing that He selects these persons whom the Lord speaks of as “babes”. Now we need to be maintained in this attitude of complete dependence; simple in our relations with the Father, simple enough to look to the Spirit for help, and to look to the Lord for His teaching and guidance; such are the babes who are spoken of here. Think of the Father being well-pleased in the babes here, who were the disciples. So we need to be preserved in this state of babes as long as we are here. It is not that we grow from babes to men according to this setting. In other settings we are to grow, but not here, we are to be maintained in this babe attitude, drinking in these things that the Lord speaks about.

He does not say what these things are, but they were the things the Lord spoke of, the things that the Lord came to do. The Lord says in chapter 2, “did ye not know that I ought to be occupied in my Father’s business?”, Luke 2: 49. Think of the Lord here in His Father’s business. “These things” related to His Father’s business. Consider the great business God has in hand at the present time, the formation of the kingdom, the formation of the assembly, how great these things are, and it is babes who come into them. It is not persons of human intellect, not the wise and prudent, but babes who come into the good and enjoyment and formation of these wonderful things, “my Father’s business”. The Lord was here in that business, and the Spirit is here in that business, if we can use that word. Did not the servant in Genesis 24, a type of the Spirit, speak about “my business”? He says in Genesis 24: 33, “I will not eat until I have made known my business”. Think of the Spirit here on business, shall we say, to use that word, it is the very best that God has in mind in “these things”. The Lord’s business, the Father’s business, the Spirit’s business, how great “these things” are, far greater than the things of men. All their science and technology shut out “these things”. So it is the babes who are selected. The simpler we are the better. We become complicated but Christianity is simple, these babes would set that out here.

Then the Lord first of all speaks to the Father, “I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth, that thou hast hid these things from wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes—yea, Father, for thus has it been well-pleasing in thy sight”. He speaks to the Father first in thanksgiving that He had these babes, if we are in that attitude the Lord will be pleased with us, the Lord in principle will thank the Father for us. Is it not a privilege to be in this kind of state that the Lord will thank the Father for, subjects of divine purpose, selected persons? The Lord would have us in this babe state, simple and drinking in the truth and being representative of Him. So after speaking to the Father, the Lord says, “All things have been delivered to me by my Father”. He speaks to the disciples, He speaks to these babes, “and no one knows who the Son is but the Father, and who the Father is but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son is pleased to reveal him”. You think of what is contained in that verse, the inscrutability of the Son. The Son is not the subject of revelation, the Son in His Person is inscrutable. But the Father is the subject of revelation. He says, “no one knows who the Son is but the Father”; there is something about the Son that we cannot penetrate although we know Him as our Lord Jesus. We are attracted to Him, we become attached to Him in a babe-like attitude, we depend on Him, but in His Person He is inscrutable, “no one knows who the Son is but the Father, and who the Father is but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son is pleased to reveal him”. You think of how the Lord speaks in the gospel of John about the Father. Over and over again He speaks about the Father. You might say He labours to get the disciples, these babes, to understand the Father, to appreciate the Father. We need to live in communion with the Father’s thoughts as to the Son, and the Son’s thoughts as to the Father; to be with the Father in His appreciation of the Son and to be alongside the Son in His appreciation of the Father. That is open to such babes.

Scientific men in this world, great men of this world do not know anything about it. The greatest things that God’s heart can devise, they know nothing about it, but the babes are such as can be initiated into this wonderful divine order of things. So it says, “And having turned to the disciples privately”, these are the babes, “he said, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see”, great things of revelation. Able men are in darkness as to it all, but believers in this babe attitude are enlightened into these wonderful things. We are privileged to speak about them, and we can speak about them intelligently. We might take it for granted, but just consider what a wonderful thing it is to be together and speak about these wonderful things that occupy divine Persons. They may occupy our minds because we are simple and uncomplicated and not diverted by human intellect and human ability. So He says, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see. For I say to you that many prophets and kings have desired to see the things which ye behold, and did not see them; and to hear the things which ye hear, and did not hear them”. They did not belong to Old Testament times, but we are privileged to enter into the glory and blessedness of these wonderful things that the Lord speaks about here. I would say, “babes” in Luke 10 are in view of coming into the greatness and blessedness of the revelation of God; they are mentioned in Luke 10 in contrast to the wise and prudent.

In 1 Peter the babes are mentioned in contrast to the things we have to lay aside, and in view of coming into God’s house, what is collective, where we can be together serving God. He says, “Laying aside therefore all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings”, these things have to be laid aside. These things, malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings and evil speakings relate to what is collective. Obviously if there is no one available, there is not malice; and if there is no one to deceive there is no sense in guile; but malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings and evil speakings relate to what could operate with one another; because malice involves other persons, guile involves other persons, hypocrisies involve other persons; hypocrisy means acting a part. There is no sense in acting a part if there is nobody to see us acting a part. Envyings relate to other persons, and evil speakings also. So these things have to be definitely laid aside. Then he says, “as newborn babes desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word”. The earnest desire of newborn babes is one thing. They are not complicated by other things, they have a simple eye, “desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word”. That is what we need to have, this earnest desire, this one objective to be here for the will of God, to be occupied with Christ, to “desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word, that by it ye may grow up to salvation”. This refers to newborn babes in view of growth, and we have to begin this way and be maintained this way. We have all seen a newborn babe desiring earnestly. It knows how to make a noise if that desire is not satisfied. So it is this earnestness and reality and single objective that is commended here. We are to lay aside things that would hinder and complicate and have this earnest desire for “the pure mental milk of the word” in view of growth, “that by it ye may grow up to salvation, if indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is good”. I am sure we have tasted that the Lord is good.

Then it says, “To whom coming, a living stone”, that is the Lord Jesus, “a living stone, cast away indeed as worthless by men”. He has been rejected, “but with God chosen, precious”. That no doubt refers to the present position of Christ, selected as the Firstborn from among the dead and exalted. Then we, “as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood”. This is in view of having right relations with one another so there is what corresponds with the house, and “a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”. This is in view of a company, a number of persons being together. It is babehood as being not only individually in relation to the revelation of God, but in view of being together. I have no doubt that if every believer on the face of the earth answered to this scripture here in 1 Peter 2, we would all be together; if all desired earnestly the pure mental milk of the word, we would all be together. It is the complications that come in, the prejudices and preferences, that hinder the collective answer and collective response to God. So there is affinity between the “living stone” of verse 4 and the “living stones” of verse 5. The “living stone” of verse 4 is Christ, and the “living stones” in verse 5 are believers such as ourselves, and so we are “being built up a spiritual house”. God’s house is here on earth, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is a spiritual house, not a material house, not built of bricks and mortar or stones, but “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood”, that is, persons engaged in God’s service, “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”. What a privilege it is to have part in a service like this! We have part in this and we know what this is. Our desire would be to be in it with more reality, with more consciousness, with more simplicity in view of growth. The work of God in the believer has only one objective, only one desire. The work of God is not complicated; it is what we are by nature and by the flesh that hinders the progress of the work of God.

So in 1 Corinthians, just to touch on these negative references briefly, we have babes in a sense that was not commendable. Paul says, “And *I*, brethren, have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly; as to babes in Christ”. That is, they were babes in Christ, they were believers, but they had not made much progress, they had remained in the babe state, although they were of course quite young believers, possibly maybe two years converted. Paul had been among them for eighteen months and had instructed them. I have no doubt he had left them in a good state as the opening verses of the first chapter indicate. He says, “I thank my God always about you, in respect of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus; that in everything ye have been enriched in him, in all word of doctrine, and all knowledge, according as the testimony of the Christ has been confirmed in you ...”, 1 Cor 1: 4, 5. That is how they were when Paul left them. I cannot imagine Paul being with them eighteen months and leaving them in a state of confusion; but it is how the enemy operates, that instead of making progress, instead of growth, they were still babes in Christ. What hindered was the flesh, I “have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly; as to babes in Christ. I have given you milk to drink, not meat, for ye have not yet been able, nor indeed are ye yet able; for ye are yet carnal”. We need to overcome the flesh and fleshly interests and fleshly desires if we are going to leave this babe state according to this setting. It was a reproach to these believers that they were babes in Christ, all they could take was milk. Now milk, of course, is suited to the babe state. It does not take much of the digestive system to operate to take milk, it is what is easily assimilated, it is what suits the immature babe condition. Paul was ready to give them that, and had given them that, but he would rather have seen them with some growth, so that they would be able to take what he calls meat, which needs to be digested.

We need to develop a digestive system spiritually. We know what it is to have a digestive system physically, but we need a digestive system spiritually, so that we are able not only to hear, but to consider and get the good of what we hear. There is much made in the Old Testament about the food suited to the people of God. It says in Deuteronomy, “Ye are sons of Jehovah your God” (Deut 14: 1), and He tells them what food to eat. One kind of food was the animals that chewed the cud, typical of persons who are able to get the good of what they hear. We need to have this kind of digestive system spiritually operating, so that what comes to us is rightly considered and becomes part of us in the way of formation. Chewing the cud is just that; the truth is so considered that it becomes part of us. It makes for spiritual formation, and that is what these Corinthians lacked; they could take only milk and more milk, but meat was what Paul would have given them. Part of the priests’ food was the jawbone and the maw, according to Deuteronomy 18: 3. These were the parts of the animal that were suitable for the priests’ food. The jawbone would represent that eating, as Paul said, “Think of what I say”, think of what I say, “for the Lord will give thee understanding in all things”, 2 Tim 2: 7. The jawbone would involve the eating, and the maw is the stomach, it is the inward working so that formation takes place. That belongs to men, it belongs to the development of this spiritual, shall I say, digestive system, so that we are able to take in what is deeper and what is greater in view of our formation. That is where the Corinthians failed because they were fleshly, they were giving way to the flesh. He says, “whereas there are among you emulation and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk according to man? For when one says, *I* am of Paul, and another, *I* of Apollos, are ye not men?” They were actually saying they were following local leaders. All that is fleshly, and belongs to this immature babe state that cannot be commended. So what we need is to go on to growth and development and formation in manhood. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14: 20, “Brethren, be not children in your minds”, and that word is, little children, “but in malice be babes; but in your minds be grown men”. He says at the end of the epistle, “Be vigilant; stand fast in the faith; quit yourselves like men; be strong. Let all things ye do be done in love”, 1 Cor 16: 13, 14. Paul exhorts in this epistle that manhood might come to light, that there may be growth in this way.

Now in Hebrews, again the babe state is referred to, and that was because, while they had come so far, they were in danger of turning back. He says about the priesthood of Melchisedec, “Concerning whom we have much to say, and hard to be interpreted in speaking of it, since ye are become dull in hearing”, Heb 5: 11. They had apparently not been dull in hearing before, they had listened, they had heard and taken things in, but they had gone back, they had become dull in hearing. That can mark any one of us, instead of going on and making progress, we can stop or go back. “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have again need that one should teach you what are the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food. For every one that partakes of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe”. The writer is concerned that they should move from this helpless kind of condition where they have to be continually spoon fed. That does not belong to growth. “For every one that partakes of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe; but solid food belongs to full-grown men, who, on account of habit, have their senses exercised”. This is a matter of having the senses exercised “for distinguishing both good and evil “. So he says, “Wherefore, leaving the word of the beginning of the Christ”; the beginning is all right but we are not to stay at the beginning, we are to go on; he says, “let us go on to what belongs to full growth”. Certain things belong to full growth and the writer exhorts these persons to “go on to what belongs to full growth, not laying again a foundation”. That is, we are meant to have a right foundation, and having a foundation in our souls, going on to be occupied with what belongs to full growth. If we are occupied with what belongs to full growth we will come to full growth. That is the full-grown man, having all his senses exercised.

May we all be encouraged to be occupied with what belongs to full growth; not to continue in childish things, in spiritually childish things. We are to be child-like but not childish. There is a difference between being child-like and childish. Child-like is the babe state according to Matthew 11 and Luke 10 and 1 Peter 2; but childish would be like the babes of 1 Corinthians 3 and Hebrews 5. May we all desire to go on to full growth, to manhood, in view of being established, being firm and definite in testimony here, and for the pleasure and service of God. May the Lord help each one of us, for His Name’s sake.

**WARNAMBOOL**

**June 1984**

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# THE WARS OF CANAAN

**Judges 3: 1-4**

**Ephesians 6: 10-18**

We often hear the question asked as to why there are conflicts and difficulties, why all localities are not in perfect peace. We learn from this scripture in the book of Judges that Jehovah left certain nations. From one point of view the children of Israel failed to dispossess these nations, but from another point of view, Jehovah left them “to prove Israel by them, all that had not known all the wars of Canaan”. The children of Israel were to “know war by learning it”, and we are to expect conflict as long as we are here. Each generation has to be built up in view of facing conflict, because there are enemies, and because, according to Ephesians 6, there is a great universal struggle going on continually, not against blood and flesh, but against principalities and authorities, “against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies”. These unseen angelic powers opposed to the testimony are ever active and there is never a moment when there are not critical conditions somewhere.

It has been rightly said that there has never been a time since the revival, to which our brother referred, when there have not been critical conditions somewhere. When the Lord comes to reign, all these enemies will be dealt with; these universal lords, these principalities and authorities will all be dealt with. But they are not dealt with yet, they are left. These nations that we read of in Judges 3 were left purposely by Jehovah “to prove Israel by them”. The Lord loves to prove His own work and He loves to see persons proving themselves in the testimony, not just professedly but with purpose of heart; conflict proves such persons.

This scripture in Judges views the people of God as having inherited the land of promise, the land of Canaan, which was promised from the days of Abraham; but certain nations were left there. The previous book, the book of Joshua, unfolds to us how the land of promise was secured through seven years of intense conflict. Now, that has been so in the history of the testimony; there has been intense conflict to secure the land of promise. The land of promise for us, in a few words, would be the enjoyment of eternal life, for eternal life is the great promise of God. Corresponding with the book of Joshua, think of the conflicts there have been! Think of the conflict as to eternal life; what a conflict that was! How many were lost in that conflict for the truth of eternal life! The truth of eternal life was recovered and has been maintained, just as in this book of Judges the land of promise had been secured.

The warfare in Ephesians 6 is a defensive struggle; every part of the panoply is defensive. It is not so much a question of going ahead and securing territory; the territory is viewed as having been secured through conflict. The land is often spoken of as being God’s purpose, but it was promised to Abraham. The great promise of God is eternal life. Now the enjoyment of eternal life means that as set together the Lord Jesus has His rightful place, the Holy Spirit’s presence is known, and brethren dwell together in unity. These are the conditions for the enjoyment of eternal life; but then how busy the enemy is! He can bring in feeling between brothers and between sisters, he will do his utmost to hinder the enjoyment of eternal life by whatever means he can use.

Hence the reference to these enemies, “five lordships of the Philistines”. We know what the Philistines represent; the will of man and the mind of man. It speaks about “all the Canaanites”; the Canaanites were extensive in the land of Canaan; and then the Sidonians, and then “the Hivites that dwell on mount Lebanon; from mount Baal-Hermon ...” It is very like the description of the enemies in Ephesians 6. “Five lordships of the Philistines” may be likened to the “universal lords of this darkness”. “Spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies” may be likened to these references to mountains linked with the Hivites. “Our struggle” is always going on, but there is provision in the panoply of God to be able to stand in this struggle and maintain the conditions that the land of promise would suggest, the enjoyment of eternal life in our gatherings. That is what the enemy is against. He cannot do much about individuals being faithful and testifying, but he can be successful in hindering the enjoyment of the conditions of eternal life in our gatherings together.

We need therefore to appreciate the panoply of God with which we shall be able to stand, for the panoply, or the whole armour, of God, is defensive. “Put on the panoply of God, that ye may be able to stand against the artifices of the devil ... For this reason take to you the panoply of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day”. The evil day is when the struggle comes to our locality, when we are involved in the struggle. Of course we always ought to be involved in prayer regarding “our struggle” because it is one great universal struggle, but “the evil day” might refer to when the artifices of the devil are manifest in our own place. We are not to look for a panoply then, the panoply is to be on before then. “For this reason take to you the panoply of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having accomplished all things, to stand. Stand therefore ...”. These three references to “stand” would indicate this defensive warfare in which we all ought to be involved, and we shall only stand as having on this panoply.

The first item is, “having girt about your loins with truth”; that is not just the truth known, but the truth formed in the believer. All these elements involve formation, not just knowledge, as our brother has said, but formation, “having girt about your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace”—truth, righteousness, peace. “Besides all these, having taken the shield of faith with which ye will be able to quench all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. Have also the helmet of salvation ...”. We had salvation on Lord’s day afternoon, over against persons being led astray. “The helmet of salvation” would protect our minds, not by mental ability, but by our minds being formed. “The helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word”. The sword is part of this defensive warfare. You would not find a soldier defending a position without a weapon. The sword is needed to defend, to hinder the enemy from intruding. All these elements in the armour, as far as I can see, are defensive. And then, “praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching unto this very thing with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints”.

We need to realise, dear brethren, young people included, that we need to be built up in our souls, in our affections, to defend the enjoyment of the promise that God has made us at the present time.

Eternal life is the promise of God, just as the land of Canaan was the promise of God. Our struggle is continuous, for the enemy is always attacking somewhere. Let us be concerned to be built up! Let us realise that there is such a thing as the panoply of God, involving the believer formed in these features. Truth; the truth about everything, righteousness, peace—how much this kind of preparation is needed; “and shod your feet with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace”—faith, salvation, the sword of the Spirit, prayer, “praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching unto this very thing with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints”—all seasons, all prayer, all perseverance, all the saints. May we know something about this! We are not to expect a perfect, tranquil order of things, because we are being proved, and the enemies are very real and ever active. The Lord would nevertheless encourage us that we should be built up in our knowledge of God and in these features in this chapter, that we might not be overcome but be overcomers. May it be so for His own sake.

**EDINBURGH**

**22nd January 1985**

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# JESUS AS SAVIOUR, LORD AND TEACHER

**Luke 1: 46, 47**

**Philippians 3: 7, 8**

**Mark 10: 51, 52**

**John 20: 16, 17**

I have read of a person who spoke of my Saviour; another person who spoke of my Lord; and two persons who spoke of my Teacher; there is a moral order in these expressions. I wonder if we can all identify our Saviour. There is only one Saviour; every man, woman, and child needs a Saviour, and there is only one Saviour, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. The glad tidings are concerning Him, and we present Him to each person here this evening as Saviour. He is the Saviour of the world, that is true, He has saved many, that is also true, but what I would be concerned about is that every one here this evening would be able to say ‘my Saviour’. That is personal; the gospel is a very personal matter. God desires that all men should be saved, and God has made provision that all men should be saved: Christ Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all but what about each one of us personally? Can you say genuinely, ‘my Saviour’? Did you ever think what it cost the Lord Jesus that you might be able to say ‘my Saviour’? It cost Him untold sufferings that He might be your Saviour. The One whom we present in the glad tidings as Saviour is God. John’s gospel tells us that. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” John 1: 1. What could be clearer as to the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then John tells us the “Word became flesh”, chap 1: 14. The greatest thing that has ever happened in the universe of God is that One of the blessed Trinity became a Man. Think of the immensity of that step, that stoop, into manhood. Paul tells us in the Philippian epistle, that He emptied Himself, see chap 2: 7. This is, dear friend, part of the cost that you might be able to say ‘my Saviour’. Not only did He come into manhood, but He suffered. He took the sinner’s place. He suffered in the sinner’s stead that you might be able to say, ‘my Saviour’. The gospel is a very blessed message, but it is a very serious matter, because when we hear the gospel we are responsible to answer to it. Persons who have never heard the gospel are not as responsible as persons who have heard the gospel over and over again. Do not let it be regarded as common; realise, dear friend, what it cost the blessed Saviour that you might be able to say, ‘my Saviour’. He suffered as if He had been the sinner. He was forsaken of God; sustained God’s righteous wrath, which was the portion that belonged to me and belonged to you. He entered into death, the awfulness of what death meant for the Lord Jesus; He poured out His precious blood; He was buried. Such was the cost that you might be able to say ‘my Saviour’. Now, He has been raised from the dead, God’s testimony to His satisfaction in that finished work, because the work that the Lord Jesus undertook is finished; there is nothing left of that work to do. He is available, dear friend, if you have never been so far able to say, ‘my Saviour’, you can say it now because He is available for you. You need to repent, to own that you need a Saviour. The great difficulty with some people is to convince them that they need a Saviour. Maybe they have been religious; maybe they think they have been good, but every one needs a Saviour; if anyone were good enough without a Saviour the Saviour need not have sustained the cost that I have tried feebly to speak about, He need not have sustained the suffering if you were righteous enough for God’s presence. No one is, every one needs a Saviour, and that blessed Saviour is available to you, you can claim Him now, and you will be able to say, ‘my Saviour’ tonight before you leave this room.

Now I would like to say a few words about how full is His service as Saviour. If you claim Him as your Saviour, you can be assured that you will never come into judgment, your sins are settled for ever; they will never rise in your lifetime here, they will never rise in the hereafter. What a Saviour He is! The consequences of those sins have been met by the Saviour. That does not give licence to go on sinning for this wonderful Saviour will not only save you from the consequences of your sins, but He will save you from your sins, save you from a sinful course. He is able to save you in situations of temptation and danger, whatever circumstance of sorrow or suffering that you may have to undergo, the Lord Jesus is sufficient to save you, dear friend, He will save you daily. You need a Saviour, we need salvation daily and the Lord Jesus is available to save us every moment, every day, “For every one whosoever, who shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved”, Rom 10: 13. As you own Him as your Saviour and Lord He will dispense the blessed gift of the Holy Spirit, making the believer independent of the world around: imparting a sense of joy and satisfaction that makes him independent of this world’s system and all that goes on in it. He is able to change our taste. When we are young, we have tastes for the world; I was once young, many here can say that, worldly things appeal to you, but as you know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and are committed to Him, as you trust Him you find your tastes change and the world appeals less, and less, and less, and He and His interests appeal more, and more, and more, that is experience to which many can bear witness in this room.

Is that all? That is not all. Paul tells us “we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to his body of glory” (Phil 3: 20, 21), that might be spoken of as the last act of the fulness of the service of the Lord Jesus as Saviour. Do you know what it means? We shall no longer have bodies subject to disease and suffering and weakness, we will have bodies of glory like His body of glory. Paul tells us He is Saviour of the body which refers to His interest in our bodies down here, but includes the fact that He will change our body of humiliation, for it is indeed a body of humiliation we have now, we will have bodies of glory like His. What a prospect is before the believer who is able to say ‘my Saviour’. Those who sleep in Jesus, whose lives of testimony are over, who in their life-time here were able to say ‘my Saviour’ and whose bodies are now in the grave will hear the same blessed Saviour shout the triumphant shout and every one will rise from the dead. This is the Saviour we are commending to you in the glad tidings. I would ask, Do you trust Him? Is He not worth trusting? One who undertakes to be our Saviour all the way through? At times we do not trust Him sufficiently. I tell you He is well worth trusting as Saviour; may we increase in our appreciation of Him. I trust every one here will be able to say ‘my Saviour’, if not, I trust you will be concerned and exercised to claim such a Saviour for yourself personally.

Now we come to another person, not only was he able to say, my Saviour, but he said, my Lord, “Christ Jesus my Lord”. Now it maybe that you know the Lord Jesus as Saviour, and maybe trust Him as Saviour, but I wonder if you are committed to Him as Lord. This is a further and fuller exercise. Paul could say, “what things were gain to me these I counted, on account of Christ, loss”. Now I understand that verse 7 of Philippians 3 refers to Paul’s conversion; when he was converted, he counted all these things, these assets he at one time thought he had to be loss. “As to circumcision, I received it the eighth day; of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, persecuting the assembly; as to righteousness which is in the law, found blameless”; these are things that he could have boasted about, but when the Lord appeared to him on that Damascus road, what conclusion did he come to? “What things were gain to me these I counted, on account of Christ, loss”. He got a glimpse of the glory of the Lord Jesus which eclipsed everything else in his life and he was never the same man again, his outlook was different, his whole life was revolutionised instantaneously, and he counted these things he was self-satisfied with on account of Christ, loss.

Then he says, “But surely I count also all things to be loss”, I count; the conclusion that Paul came to on the Damascus road when he said, “Who art thou, Lord?”, and when he said “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22: 8, 10), the committal was maintained, “surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”. I wonder if we can all speak of Jesus as ‘my Lord’; every one committed to Him as the writer was here. What a life of devotion was the life of the one who had been called Saul of Tarsus, the big self-important man; but he becomes Paul, which means little; he speaks of himself as the less than the least of all saints.

If we are not committed to Jesus as Lord, it may be because we do not trust Him; it may be because we think we can do better for ourselves in going our own way, we may think we will be happier going our own way than being committed to the Lord Jesus. That may be the reason why some of us are not as committed as we ought to be. I would like to tell you, dear friend, that you can trust Jesus as Lord. Paul would tell you this, he says, “on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all”; did he regret it? Did he regret suffering the loss of all? No, he said, “and count them to be filth, that I may gain Christ”. I wonder if we are all committed to Jesus as Lord, which means that our own wills are not active; that we are here for the will of God; we are here for the pleasure of our Lord Jesus Christ, and are committed to Him and His interests. The Holy Spirit will help us in this, He will give joy and satisfaction in doing the will of Another. If you have not committed yourself to the Lord up till now, dear friend, I would entreat you to trust Him. You will be far happier, more satisfied, doing the Lord’s will, doing God’s will than doing your own will. You may not believe that. Young people especially do not view things that way, but, dear friend, it is the truth, I can tell you. Doing your own will eventually will bring sorrow, it could even bring disaster, but doing the will of God, committing yourself to Jesus as Lord, you will never regret. I have never known any one regretting committal to Jesus as Lord, and to His interests. The most satisfying life you could have is to be here for the will of God. It speaks in Romans of presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service. Then it goes on to say, “be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God”, chap 12: 1, 2. I commend this step to you. Saul of Tarsus took it. It is a step some here could tell you about; it is a step never to be regretted; full committal to the Lord Jesus. Is He not worthy of your trust? Give up your ideas that you are happier doing your own will; decide for Christ. You do not need to decide to do your own will, you do not need to decide to go into the world, that does not call for decision; that happens because there is not decision for Christ. It is lack of decision for Christ that leads into the world. To go into the world does not necessarily call for decision, but you need to decide for Christ; that is where decision is essential. The enemy is pleased if he can divert us from decision and committal because he knows that he can then have his way with us. The answer to it, dear friend, is definite decision and committal to the Lord, to say, ‘my Lord’. Then you will be with others, because you will find in the Scriptures not only the expression ‘my Lord’ but very often ‘our Lord’, our Lord Jesus Christ. That involves companionship, you are not alone; you find others who also say, ‘my Lord’, and you can be with them and say ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’.

Now, we read of two persons who said, Rabboni, and I am told that Rabboni means, my Teacher. There would be a moral order in this; you begin by saying ‘my Saviour’, and I trust we have all reached this decision to say ‘my Lord’, then you will find that you need the Lord Jesus as your Teacher. There was a blind man in Mark 10 who sat by the wayside begging; he could not see his way. Let us face it, we live in difficult times when the church publicly has failed to be a witness to Christ; the church publicly is in ruins, not only breakdown, but publicly in hopeless, un-mendable ruin. There are various companies, various groups; how do we find our way? Dear friend, say, ‘my Teacher’. The Lord said to this man, “What wilt thou that I shall do to thee?”. The Lord may be saying that to some person here. What would you answer? A bigger salary! More opportunity in the world? This man said, “Rabboni” - my Teacher - “that I may see”; see where to go, see where the Lord is, see what the Lord is doing. Jesus said to him, “Go, thy faith has healed thee. And he saw immediately, and followed him in the way”. He had to see to follow, he could not see when he was blind. O, how we need the Teacher! I believe that if any one who has genuine exercise, is not governed by prejudice, or by preference, but is simply subject to the Lord’s leading as Teacher, he will be guided rightly; it must be so. I am not saying where He would guide you to, I am commending Him to you as your Teacher. Say ‘my Teacher’, be subject, be leadable. You could not say ‘my Teacher’ unless you have first of all said ‘my Saviour’, and then said ‘my Lord’. There is a great need to have the Teacher who will guide you aright, who will open your eyes and you will see, and be able to follow Him in the way, in the midst of this public ruin. People speak about this group and that group and splinter groups, we ought to be deeply sorrowful that these things have happened in our own time but ‘my Teacher’, dear friend, is the answer. There is a need to repudiate and judge prejudices and preferences, and simply commit yourself to ‘my Teacher’, and you will see, He will let you see where He is and you are able to follow Him; it is a practical matter at the present time.

Now there is another person who said “Rabboni”, Mary of Magdala. She knew and appreciated the cost to the Lord Jesus that He might be her Saviour and Lord, and Teacher. She was bereft of the Saviour, the last place that she knew Him to be was in the grave; she passed through that sorrow of being without her Saviour and Lord. You could have offered Mary of Magdala the best business proposition this world could offer, or tried to interest her in the best investment possible, she would not have been interested because her Lord was in the grave. But when the Lord said, “Mary”, O, that quickening life-giving word, the personal interest of Jesus, she said “Rabboni, which means Teacher”. This Teacher is not only available in the labyrinth of ruin in which we are publicly, but He will also initiate us into new relationships, divine relationships. What does the Lord say to her? “Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father”. Think of that! You would have thought, that as the Lord Jesus rose from the dead the first thing He would have done would be to go to His Father. But no, He is thinking of His own. He said, “I have not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God”. The Lord would teach us these wonderful divine secrets, family relations. The Lord Jesus said “my Father”; no one could say ‘my father’ like the Lord Jesus, how He knew the Father. He said in the consciousness of sonship “my Father”, but He also said, “your Father”. He is distinctive in sonship, but believers are brought into the same relationship as He is as man, sonship. Then He said, “my God”, He said that as Man of another order. Think of Him saying “my God”, and then “your God”, that is we are brought into the same order of manhood as the Lord Jesus is. These are wonderful divine family, privileged, relationships that the Lord would teach us and initiate us into the enjoyment of. On the public side we need guidance, we need ‘my Teacher’, but we need Him to bring us into the enjoyment of eternal relationships. It says in this same gospel, “If therefore the Son shall set you free, ye shall be really free”, John 8: 36. That is really free in the area of privilege in all the wealth and fulness of the blessings which were in divine purpose, to be enjoyed now, not only individually but to be enjoyed with others.

May the Lord make these suggestions attractive to us. Do not trifle, dear friend. If there is any one here who cannot say ‘my Saviour’, I appeal to you, do not leave this room until you can, there are plenty here who could help you. If you cannot in reality say ‘my Lord’ face the matter honestly, come under the blessed divine authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is nothing more blessed, nothing more happy, nothing more satisfying. And then, may we all know and follow the Lord’s own teaching for His Name’s sake.

**GLASGOW**

**10th November 1985**

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# THE VALUE OF WHAT IS IN THE BODY

**1 Samuel 25: 32–35**

**2 Samuel 20: 15-19, 22 (first sentence); 21: 10-14**

**1 Kings 1: 1-4**

One of the objectives in the giving of the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4 is “with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ”. That work is proceeding, and there is a result in the body. There is also the need to take responsibility; the Lord expects persons to take on responsibility, but very often those who take on responsibility are not all they ought to be, such persons therefore need to value what is in the body. In church history, defection came in with persons responsible; publicly the responsible element has failed the Lord, hence the ruin publicly, but what goes through is what is in the body. What has come all through the centuries is what was formed of Christ in the body here. Responsibly and publicly there is ruin, but we need to value what is in the body. That is why I read of these four women who appear in the time of David, when David was not what he ought to be. It may be a word for us who take on responsibility locally. We are all responsible. The Lord addresses the angels of the seven assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3. All are responsible, but some are more responsible than others. In anything that is done in our localities responsible persons need to have the mind of God, otherwise things become difficult. When these women appeared in David’s time David was responsible, but he did not have the mind of God. It was characteristic of David to enquire of Jehovah, but he did not always enquire; every time he enquired of Jehovah he got the mind of God, and he went forward dependently and successfully, and the Lord’s interests prospered in his hand. But he did not always enquire, and in these scriptures we have read, when these women come to light, David did not have the mind of God, but there was in these four women the element that he had to appreciate and that we need to appreciate more, maybe, than we have done.

First of all we have Abigail, often spoken of. This is the first time, as far as I discern, that David makes a request from anybody; he made a request from Nabal and he was insulted, and David reacted immediately. He did not enquire of Jehovah; he did not have the mind of God. Persons who take responsibility ought to have the mind of God; but David did not enquire. But Abigail comes to light; she was no doubt the result of ministry. Ministry is given for the edifying of the body of Christ, and Abigail was the result of that kind of ministry. The opening verses of the chapter say that “Samuel died; and all Israel were gathered together, and lamented him; and they buried him in his house at Ramah”, 1 Sam 25: 1. I have no doubt Abigail can be viewed as the result of Samuel’s ministry. The result of ministry may be more valuable than the one who ministers, because the result of ministry from Christ is the formation of Christ, and that is what we see in Abigail. We need increasingly to value what is in the body. It may not appear on the surface, but it is meant to be expressed. Abigail gave expression to what she represented; she had discernment when David did not.

We need to value, dear brethren, what is in the body in our localities. It may be in sisters, but not only in sisters; it is what is in persons in divine formation. The responsible element, of course, is necessary, but it is most important that persons who take on responsibility should have God’s mind. David says himself, “blessed be thy discernment, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from coming with bloodshed, and from avenging myself with mine own hand”. You see how far David is away from the mind of God; that was not David characteristically. Actually, Abigail represented what David was characteristically, while David was not representing what he really was as a man of God, and that can happen, and does happen. But there was something reliable in what was in the body. He says, “Indeed, as Jehovah the God of Israel liveth, who has restrained me from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, there had not been left to Nabal by the morning light any male”. There would have been unnecessary loss of life had not Abigail intervened with her discernment, had she not supplied what David lacked for the moment; as applying to ourselves, had what was in the body not expressed itself to help the responsible element. Responsibility has to be taken on, but let us have increasing regard for what is in the body.

Then, too, what is in the body needs to be expressed; it is to be active as Abigail was here; she might have had discernment and kept quiet and remained where she was, but what she was expressed itself and acted and saved David from a great calamity. She said, “And now, my lord, as Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing Jehovah has restrained thee from coming with bloodshed”, 1 Sam 25: 26. David here, responsible, had to be restrained, and the restraining element was Abigail, who was of divine workmanship and reliable at the moment. David recognised it, he listened, and there was a saving of life. We need therefore to value what is in the body.

Now in 2 Samuel 20 David is called the king, but he does not have judgment, in fact he acts politically, well below what he was characteristically. He commits himself to Amasa in chapter 19, but he let him down. He speaks to Abishai in verse 6 of chapter 20, but his weakness and lack of judgment made way for Joab to come into the situation; and that kind of thing can happen to us. David was responsible but he let things slip. This kind of thing has happened, no doubt, over and over again in church history, making way for a man like Joab, an unspiritual man who would have destroyed the whole city. But there was a woman there and she was the means of the salvation of the place. She speaks of “a mother in Israel”; she had motherly features; she had in mind to maintain life with the minimum loss. She suggests that one man is responsible, and that one man has to be dealt with, not the whole city. She is spoken of as a wise woman, a woman who had judgment, a woman who knew how to act. David ought to have had judgment, but he was weak and left things to others, left things to an unspiritual element. These are all lessons for us.

So this wise woman “cried out of the city, Hear, hear”; she had wisdom; she had right judgment; but that in a sense was not sufficient; that right judgment has to be expressed. What is in the body, and the right judgment, has to express itself. So this wise woman “cried out of the city, Hear, hear: say, I pray you, unto Joab”. She cries out. There was need for someone to cry out, and she cried out, “Hear, hear: say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee. And he came near to her; and the woman said, Art thou Joab? And he said, I am he. And she said to him, Listen to the words of thy handmaid. And he said, I am listening”. There was moral power with her, not with the king, not with the one who was responsible; the moral power was with the woman; the moral power was in what can be likened to the body in divine workmanship. It was reliable, more reliable than responsible persons sometimes are; more reliable than David. Think of the moral power of this woman to get Joab to listen; he said, “I am listening”; ruthless warrior that he was, he said, “I am listening”. It was the salvation of the whole city at this critical time. Incidentally, in the earlier part of this section Joab assassinated Amasa, and Amasa was wallowing in blood in the highway; it says, “all the people stood still” when they saw Amasa. There was in this chapter the main issue, the main issue was Sheba. Amasa was a side-issue, very serious, but nevertheless a side-issue. A man “removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by stood still”, 2 Sam 20: 12. They were held up, but when Amasa was removed out of the highway all the people went after Joab to pursue after Sheba; the main issue was Sheba; Amasa was a side-issue, a very serious one, but that had to be left for the moment. Often in a main issue, side-issues come in which deflect and disturb and occupy us, but it is the main issue that has to be pursued, the side-issue was seen to later; it was not neglected. God saw that what Joab did to Amasa was finally dealt with; but there was the main issue pursued and this woman comes to light in the city.

Now in 2 Samuel 21 another woman comes to light. This is the chapter of the Gibeonites. There was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year, and eventually David enquired of Jehovah and he got the answer, but the king was weak in judgment; he left the judgment to the Gibeonites. Instead of the king in responsibility acting with right judgment, he leaves the judgment to others, in this case to the Gibeonites. “David said to the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and with what shall I make atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of Jehovah? And the Gibeonites said to him, As to Saul and his house, it is with us no question of receiving silver or gold, neither is it for us to have any man put to death in Israel”. David said, “What ye say will I do for you”, 2 Sam 21: 3, 4. Think of one responsible saying to the Gibeonites, ‘What you say; just what you say’. This is lack of judgment with David. The Gibeonites say, It is not for us to put any man to death, and when David says, “What ye say will I do”, they ask for the death of seven men of Saul’s house. See how weak David is; but there is a woman here. These men were slaughtered; it says in verse 9, “and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill before Jehovah. And they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the first days of the harvest, in the beginning of barley harvest”.

David lacked judgment and he lacked right feelings; the feelings that David ought to have had were found with this woman—“Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water poured on them out of the heavens, and suffered neither the fowl of the heavens to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night”. This woman had right feelings regarding the whole matter. “And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done”. Someone told David about Rizpah’s feelings and actions, and then David was alerted and eventually he went and took the bones. How many times bones are mentioned! “David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan ... and he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. And they buried them with the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zela”. The bones suggest that something remained to be done; something was left; issues were unresolved, but this woman’s exercise becomes a means of matters being rightly resolved, and issues settled. The feelings of this woman caused David at last to bury these bones, to have matters finally settled according to God. How important it is that things should be settled! It says, “And afterwards God was propitious to the land”. Do we not want God to be propitious? We do not wish famine conditions, things not as congenial as they ought to be, not the food supply that there ought to be. The Lord would help us as appreciating the right feelings amongst the brethren, as represented in Rizpah here, to have matters settled, issues concluded according to God, that God may be propitious to the land.

In 1 Kings 1 we have David’s weakness, a lack of vitality, a lack of warmth which clothes did not supply. His servants said to him, “Let there be found for my lord the king a young virgin; and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him ... that my lord the king may get warm”. Oh what a fine element this is! There was with David waning, weakness, lack of vitality; but a young virgin brought in life, warmth, vitality. If we compare the end of 2 Samuel, and the beginning of 1 Kings, with 1 Chronicles we may conclude that Abishag had part in reviving David and the establishing of the service of God. Here David is in abject weakness and strengthening comes in by this young virgin. There is the suggestion that they should look for such a person, and it says, “they sought for a fair damsel throughout the territory of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king”. Oh may there be a searching for this kind of element to bring in freshness of warmth and vitality at the present time. In our local settings we may need this kind of thing to be found. She is a very attractive person, “And the damsel was very fair; and cherished the king, and ministered to him; but the king knew her not”.

All this was in view of the selection of Solomon. There immediately comes in the rising of Adonijah—“I will be king”. What was the answer to this kind of element? Abishag was the answer; David was not able for it, but Abishag brought in the strengthening, the vitality and the warmth that was needed to revive the responsible element represented in David. It says in 1 Kings 1: 15, “And Bathsheba went in to the king into the chamber; and the king was very old; and Abishag the Shunammite ministered to the king”. Dear brethren, we need to support those who take on responsibility; there is need to strengthen, maybe need of adjustment, maybe need of restraint; that is how things are going to be held for God’s pleasure and God’s glory. May we as responsible persons value what is in the body, divine workmanship, divine formation. Let us depend on it; it is the dependable element, but it needs to be expressed in helping, restraining or strengthening, or bringing light to persons responsible. May it be so in our local settings for the continuance in dignity of the testimony, and for the pleasure and glory and service of God.

**EALING**

**7th June 1986**

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# OUR HEARTS AND OUR FEET

**1 Timothy 2: 1–7**

**2 Timothy 2: 19–22**

We have sung of the Lord’s coming and we await His coming, but in the waiting time we would desire to be faithful and to represent God while He leaves us here. Two features are to mark us—our hearts are to be as large as God’s, and our feet in the narrow path. It is possible to have our hearts large and to be open and loose in our walk. It is possible to have our feet in the narrow path but not have a large outlook, God’s outlook. We need both these features, which we find mentioned a number of times in Mr Darby’s letters.

We find in 1 Timothy 2 how large God’s heart is. He desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. God has all men in view and we are exhorted to have this evangelical outlook. Paul speaks of “Our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”. Then he says, “the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all”, for all. The gospel presents the fact that what has been accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ is available for all. Not only is there God’s desire for all men, but also there is the work that is available for all. How wonderful that God has this outlook towards all! It has been maintained for, nearly two thousand years right to the present day. If we are rightly to represent God, we need to have this kind of outlook. Paul says, “I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men”. This is a challenge to us, but if we are to represent God here in testimony this is the kind of heart we are to have towards all men, “for this is good and acceptable before our Saviour God”.

We often come short of the largeness of God’s heart regarding all men. If we had this kind of outlook we would be praying not only for all the preachings in our rooms but the great work that is going on universally. In His sovereignty God can use whatever means are available to reach men because He desires that all men should be saved. We may not be able to have fellowship with every such effort in the gospel, but we ought to be thankful there are such efforts, because of God’s sovereignty and the largeness of His heart, and we need to have hearts like God’s in our outlook towards all men. Paul speaks in Colossians 1 of his outlook—“Whom *we* announce, admonishing every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom, to the end that we may present every man perfect in Christ”, Col 1: 28. That was Paul; what an evangelist he was! We ought to long to have hearts like that.

Then Paul mentions to the Colossians and the Ephesians love towards all the saints. We need a large heart and an evangelical outlook including all men, but then also love for all the saints, which would include every believer on earth. Our attitude ought to be love towards such, like the Lord, because He has regard for every one of His people. He does not forget any one of His own, yet in Revelation 1 the Lord presents Himself as being girt about the breasts with a golden girdle. He has affection towards every one of His own but His affections are restrained because of conditions. If we are going to be pleasing to the Lord, if we are to represent Him, then, since He is girt about the breasts with a golden girdle, then, while we have love for all the saints, there may have to be restraint in the expression of it.

That is what we have in 2 Timothy. It says, “The Lord knows those that are his”. Every one is precious to Him, but it also says, “Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity”. It means our being separate from anything that would not be in accord with the name of the Lord. This involves our feet being in the narrow path. Our hearts are to be large, having God’s outlook upon all men and the Lord’s love for all the saints, yet there is the necessity for having our feet in this narrow path. It says, “But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen; and some to honour, and some to dishonour”. We are all part of this great house. We tend to speak of Christendom as if we were not part of it, but we are part of Christendom; we are part of the great profession. We are all in the great house, but the question is what kind of vessels we are, whether we are vessels to honour or vessels to dishonour. How we become a vessel to honour is shown in verse 21—“If therefore one shall have purified himself from these”—and that word “purified” is a very strong word, it is ‘purging himself’ from these—“in separating himself from them”—from vessels to dishonour; it involves separation from persons. It is how we move; it is our feet in a narrow path. Hearts large, but feet in the narrow path.

So it says, “If therefore one shall have purified himself from these”, that is, from vessels to dishonour, “in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified ...”. Being sanctified involves our feet being in this narrow path, the path of the will of God, the pathway related to how the Lord would have us act in this time in which we are when there is so much profession. What the Lord is looking for is reality in vessels to honour. Every one of us can be a vessel to honour by purifying himself from vessels to dishonour. Thus “He shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master”. This is the divine way of being serviceable to the Master. Many think they can be more serviceable by being more ‘open’ and disregarding divine principles, but this is the divine way of being serviceable in this day in which we are. It is intensely individual. “If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work”. “Prepared for every good work”, not by being ‘open’ and loose, but by following the directions we have in this chapter. It is the way to be prepared for every good, according to God and according to the Lord at the present time. We might think that having our feet in such a pathway would be restrictive; in a sense it is, but it is the way to be prepared for every good work.

Then it says, “But youthful lusts flee, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart”. As individually each desires to be a vessel to honour, he finds others on the same path—“with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart”. This expression, “a pure heart”, would test us as to whether there is the reality with every one of us that the Lord is looking for.

I can see the importance on the one hand of having our hearts as large as God’s, but the importance too of having our feet in this narrow path. This is not new, this is how the recovery started so brightly one hundred and fifty years ago, a wonderful sovereign movement of the Lord, answered to by persons with a pure heart. In simplicity they followed these instructions—evangelical and outgoing as far as gospel work is concerned, but with feet in the narrow path. That is how the recovery started and that is how it is going to be continued. There was a great challenge not long after this recovery began, and there have been many challenges since. One of the enemy’s most successful activities is to try to get us to depart from this way, but the Lord is looking for persons who have hearts as large as God’s but feet in the narrow path.

May the Lord encourage us. What is needed at the moment is endurance. We need to endure, to be prepared for every good work and to endure. The Lord said in Matthew 24, “he that has endured to the end, he shall be saved”, Matt 24: 11. We are near the end and it calls for endurance. The Lord said to the angel of the assembly in Philadelphia, “Because thou halt kept the word of my patience”, or ‘my endurance’, Rev 3: 10. We need to endure in this way of the will of God at the present time. May we be built up in that way and encouraged, for the Lord’s Name’s sake.

**BROOKLYN NY**

**18th November 1986**

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# THE LORD JESUS AS MASTER

**2 Timothy 2: 19-22**

**2 Peter 2: 1-3**

**Jude 3, 4**

I wonder if we all realise the wonderful time that we live in. There has never been a time like it. We are in a dispensation when the glad tidings of the glory of the blessed God are being proclaimed; this has been so for nearly twenty centuries, which shows wonderful patience and long-suffering on the part of God. The very best that divine love could devise is presented for the obedience of faith in the glad tidings. God is proposing to bless men, offering forgiveness, proposing to view believers as justified, as free from their past history of sins—as free from sins as Christ is. He is prepared to give the Holy Spirit; a wonderful gift is the gift of the Holy Spirit! He is prepared to bring us into His family as His children, as His sons, to form part of God’s house, to form part of the body of Christ. We could never have thought of such blessing as God has devised. We may have thought that getting pardon would be enough, but God has the richest, fullest thoughts of blessing for us, and all are available at the present time.

This has been so for nearly twenty centuries, but now we are near the coming of the Lord Jesus, what we speak of as the rapture, when the Lord Jesus is coming for His own. Therefore this is a very wonderful time to be in. We might have lived at the time of Pentecost; that was a wonderful time too, when believers had all things common; when those who had wealth came and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and there was administration for thousands in Jerusalem. But Paul’s ministry was not known then; it was a transitional period. This is a far more blessed time than Pentecost. Then, dear friends, we might have lived at a time when there was persecution, when we could not have had meetings like this, when believers had to have conventicles among the hills. Who has brought these conditions of liberty about? The Lord Jesus has. He writes to the angel of the assembly in Philadelphia, “I have set before thee an opened door” (Rev 3: 8), a door that was shut and is now opened, which must include conditions such as we enjoy, the privilege of coming together unmolested, able to meet in peace and quietness. That is a wonderful blessing the Lord has bestowed upon us, therefore this is a very encouraging, and a very blessed, time.

Those of us who are older are looking for the Lord to come; we expect to be here when the Lord comes, but as to the younger persons here, I can say with good assurance that you will be here when the Lord comes. What a prospect that is! I wonder if it is the prospect of every one here, or are we thinking of living here and making a fortune maybe, going on our own way, being prosperous on the earth. It is a far more blessed prospect, dear friends, to be here when the Lord comes, for the Lord has far more in store than we have any idea of.

We might have lived in the Dark Ages, when believers, genuine believers, were labouring to be assured of forgiveness. We are living in the light of justification by faith, light recovered at such cost, and let us appreciate the fact that we are allowed to come together unmolested, no one disturbing us. It is not so, of course, in every country of the world; it was not so in this country a few centuries ago; but it is now, and let us appreciate our occasions of coming together to read the Scriptures, for the breaking of bread, for the preaching, for prayer; let us appreciate these great privileges.

I have said something about the blessedness of the time. I desire now to say something about the difficult and serious time we are in. We are living in a time when the Lord is about to come for His own, but the Lord is also about to deal in judgment with what is going on in this world. We have to face that too, and it is a very sobering thought. There are two ways by which you can tell that the Lord’s coming is soon—one is to know what is in the hearts of believers, for many believers in the world today are looking forward to the rapture; that is what is inside. Then there is what is outside, with lawlessness increasing, trouble all over the world; what is it pointing to? It all points to the fact that the Lord is about to deal with every opposing element, and that is a serious consideration.

Now, what is the answer? How are we going to get through in this difficult time? I read these three scriptures because they refer to the last days. In 2 Timothy Paul says, “This know, that in the last days difficult times shall be there” (2 Tim 3: l); we are in these last days. They were not in Paul’s day; he says, “difficult times shall be there”, and we are in them now. He goes on to say, “for men shall be lovers of self”. Is that not true? Could anything be more true than that men are lovers of themselves? “Lovers of money”; is that not true? “Boastful, arrogant, evil speakers, disobedient to parents”. Is that not true at the present time? Is it not a feature of young people at the present time? They are encouraged to go their own way, not to follow their parents, not to do what their parents do, to have a mind of their own and go the way they want to go. “Ungrateful, profane, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, of unsubdued passions, savage, having no love for what is good, traitors, headlong, of vain pretensions, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”. Is this not true at the present time? These scriptures in 2 Timothy, 2 Peter and Jude deal with the conditions in which we are publicly at the present time, which believers speak of as apostasy, persons who have been enlightened, who have known the way of righteousness, and turned from it to their own way. That is a very solemn thing.

Do you think God will deal with that? Of course He will. Will God go on with that for ever? No, He will not, and soon, very soon, He will deal with the whole scene. It is a very solemn thing to think of Europe and this country, for no one who has heard the gospel and refused, or put it off, will come into blessing. There will be no second chance. We have a wonderful opportunity now. There could not be a more glorious opportunity than is presented now. If that is refused, or put off, there is nothing but judgment. But we are living in the most blessed time there could be. I do not know of any time in which I would rather have lived than now. I think every believer here would say the same, especially in view of the Lord coming soon.

What is the answer? I have read these scriptures because it is significant that in each of them the Lord is presented as the Master, the Master. Dear friend, we need a Master. We need to be committed to a Master; the only way of salvation at the present time is to be committed to the Master. We do not like the idea of slavery, do we? There was the abolition of slavery; we can understand that, but to be a slave would be a most blessed thing if you had a good master. Is it not told of a slave who, when liberation was brought about, could not think of anything better than continuing to serve his master? That was because he had a good master. You could never have a better master than the Lord Jesus. Oh, what a blessed thing it is to be a slave to Him, to be committed to Him, to be at His disposal at any moment; there is nothing more blessed, dear friend, there is nothing that would give us salvation, joy, satisfaction, like being committed to this blessed Master.

Now this Master is presented in 2 Timothy as Christ Jesus. You will find it over and over again; about eight times there is reference to Christ Jesus. In Him there is every blessing available. Life is in Christ Jesus; God’s own purpose and grace are given to us in Christ Jesus; faith and love are in Christ Jesus; grace is in Christ Jesus; salvation is in Christ Jesus; everything for our blessing and for our good is in Christ Jesus. It is a very blessed title; it involves that He is the Christ, God’s anointed and appointed Man. He has been made both Lord and Christ. He has undertaken the great work of redemption on behalf of God as the Christ, and He is going to take up and accomplish everything for God’s eternal pleasure and satisfaction; but Christ Jesus means that He has a place in my affections. The Lord is the Christ, whether you like it or not; whether men like it or not. He has been made Christ; and whether persons are subject to Him or not makes no difference. He is the Christ in any case, the Christ of God who is going to accomplish every thought that God ever had in mind, including judgment; the Christ will see to all that. But Christ Jesus, involves the personal name of Jesus.

I wonder if you have an appreciation of the Lord Jesus as Christ Jesus. It is the Lord in His present position as anointed. God’s anointed and God’s appointed Man, but along with it there is a personal appreciation of Him—Christ Jesus. I would like to give some impression of the Lord as Christ Jesus. Everything for the glory of God, and everything for the blessing of men is in Christ Jesus, and He is to be my Master. I am to be entirely subject to Him, at His disposal, my will subdued, His will dominating, serviceable to the Master. Oh, what a Master to have! Dear friend, we need such a Master; the Lord said Himself, “No servant can serve two masters”, Luke 16: 13. That means no one can be a slave to two masters. Such a one could not be loyal. If I am a slave my master’s interests are my interests, my master’s matters are my matters; my master’s business becomes my business, and my outlook is to promote what is for my master. Slavery was abused by dominating and selfish masters, but, Oh, this Master. Christ Jesus!—I would like to commend Him to every one here, that we might be subject, that we might own Him as Master. I wonder, dear friend, do you ever address, privately, the Lord Jesus as Master? Do you ever say ‘Master’ to Him? That would be a test. He is a blessed Master.

There is another master, the devil and Satan. You are either under the one Master or under the other. You are either building up Satan’s system, or you are helping to build up the system of Christ Jesus; there is no middle way. It is either the one or the other. If you have any part in building up Satan’s system I will tell you what will happen; he will take all the advantage of your service to him and leave you. Satan is the meanest master that ever there was; he will even take advantage of any weakness we may have. How mean he is! But, Oh, Christ Jesus! I would like to encourage every one here to own Him as Master, as the hymn says,

As Lord and Master in thy heart enthrone Him,

Life everlasting, peace and joy to know.

(Hymn 409)

This is the Master that I would commend to you, Christ Jesus; there is every blessing in Him. You might look around and see ruin and fragmentation among believers; even amongst so-called brethren what a fragmentation there has been; but the firm foundation of God stands; nothing in Christ Jesus fails. Dear friend, Christianity is a great success; you might think otherwise, but it is a great success. The glad tidings is going to secure persons who will form part of the holy city coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Wonderful things are being secured by the glad tidings at the present time.

Paul writes, “The Lord knows those that are his”; that is true, and is a comfort; every one here that is His the Lord knows; then he says, “Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity”—“every one who names the name of the Lord”, whether he is real or not, but the Lord knows and appreciates every one who is really His, every one who owns Him as Master. Thank God for every one who is real, but there are many who name the name of the Lord and are unreal. Reality is proved by “Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity”. It goes on to speak about vessels to honour and vessels to dishonour. Would you not like to be a vessel to honour in this Master’s business? “If therefore one shall have purified himself from these”, that is from vessels to dishonour, “in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified”; that involves separation. We may not like to hear about separation but there is no other way to be serviceable to the Master except to separate from vessels to dishonour, persons who have their part in building up Satan’s system, no matter how little the part they have. Such a one, “in separating himself from them”, “shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master”. Oh, would you not like to be serviceable to this Master, Christ Jesus, in whom every divine blessing is available to be enjoyed? This epistle speaks about the Holy Spirit—“Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted”, 2 Tim l: 14. All the blessings that are there in Christ Jesus are to be enjoyed now in the power of the Holy Spirit and are available to us at the present time. “In Christ Jesus” means that all is absolutely secure; no enemy can attack what is in Christ Jesus.

In 2 Peter and the epistle of Jude you will find other accurate descriptions of the conditions in which we are at the present time, therefore Peter speaks about the Master. He speaks of the persons who “deny the master that bought them”. “The master that bought them” is this Master we are speaking about. He has rights to every one. He has rights as Creator and as Redeemer. This Master has sovereign and supreme authority, which is God’s idea of a Master. One who has despotic rule. A true slave would never challenge the rights of the master, but here there are persons who deny the Master that bought them. Now the Master in this epistle is spoken of as Lord and Saviour. You will find in every chapter the expression Lord and Saviour. If we are going to be saved from the present current course of things, if we are going to be maintained in joy and in the blessings that are in Christ Jesus, we shall need the Lord and Saviour.

This is written to believers. You might think that only sinners need a Saviour, but I can tell you that believers need a Saviour. The last section of this epistle says, “*Ye* therefore, beloved, knowing these things before, take care lest, being led away along with the error of the wicked, ye should fall from your own stedfastness: but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen”, 2 Pet 3: 17, 18. Growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour is the way we are going to be saved, preserved from the present current apostate course of things. The Lord and Saviour, dear friend, is to be owned by you as your Master. He has rights over you, and where these rights are ignored then chapters 2 and 3 of this epistle show what is going to happen to this world. But great blessing comes from owning Him and His rights as the Master that bought us. What it cost Him! Think of the cost, the price paid, “the Master that bought them”. He has these rights over us and He is prepared to be our Lord and Saviour at this present time. May we grow in the knowledge of Him. There is no other way, because the other line is decline and “being led away along with the error of the wicked”, but we are to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”, 2 Pet 3: 18.

In the epistle of Jude we have again mention of the Master; it says, “denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ”. The Lord Jesus is presented in this epistle as our Lord Jesus Christ. This epistle supposes a community in the midst of the corruption and general departure, a community who own ‘our ... Lord Jesus Christ’. It says, “denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ”; it is a collective idea. We are to be faithful, committed to the Master individually, but we come into a fellowship of persons who own our Lord Jesus Christ. Believers who genuinely owned, recognised, and were subject to our Lord Jesus Christ would be in unity; they would be all together. That is the appeal that Paul makes to Corinth, where they were divided. Paul appeals to them, “I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all say the same thing”, 1 Cor 1: 10. To each one He is Lord and Master, but there is a fellowship of persons who own our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus in Jude 17 we have, “But *ye*, beloved, remember the words spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ”, and then in verse 20, “But *ye*, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit ...”. This is this fellowship of persons who own our Lord Jesus Christ as their Master. What a fellowship this is! I would like to be in this fellowship—“praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God”. How rich these thoughts are! What wonderfully attractive features! “Building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”. There is something to go on with, the enjoyment of life, enjoyed individually and enjoyed in fellowship among those who own our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude finishes by saying, “But to him that is able to keep you without stumbling, and to set you with exultation blameless before his glory, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, from before the whole age, and now, and to all the ages. Amen”. What has been before the whole age cannot be interfered with; and what is to all the ages will come about in God’s good time; but the test is now, “and now”—whether we are prepared to own our Lord Jesus Christ as Master. I would encourage every one here individually to address the Lord Jesus as ‘Master’. We speak together of Him as Lord; that is right; but individually He is to be our Master—we wait for instructions, just as a slave would. Every morning a slave would come to his master. Is that how we set about our day? Do we ask the Master for instructions? Are we committed to Him?

Do we own His rights always? It is a very blessed thing to be a slave to this Master, Christ Jesus, Lord and Saviour, and our Lord Jesus Christ. I would commend Him to you. It is an opportunity you have, which every one has, of committing himself or herself to such a blessed Master now. Do not miss the opportunity, dear friend, do not put it off. Submit to this Master; submit to His rights; be prepared to forego your own will; submit your will to His will. It is the only way of salvation; the only way of enjoyment. Having one foot in the world and one foot among believers does not bring joy and does not bring satisfaction. Nothing brings satisfaction but full-hearted committal to the Master, and I commend Him to every one here in view of your blessing, and in view of the blessing of others, for His Name’s sake.

**EDINBURGH**

**15th March 1987**

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# THE WAY OF LOVE

**John 13: 14, 15, 34, 35; 15: 9-12**

**1 Corinthians 12: 31; 14: 1**

J.R. We were impressed at Sunbury on Lord’s day with the way of divine love, set out especially in the early chapters of John. It is good for us to trace the way of divine love. Chapter 1: 29 says, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”. Think of divine love coming into that situation, the Lamb of God taking on sacrificially such a tremendous work as to take away the sin of the world. Chapter 3: 14: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up”. That is the way of divine love, of suffering love set out in the Son of man. Next verse: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”—God’s love, the way that God took, giving His own beloved Son. In chapter 4, there is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the living water springing up into eternal life. We could go through these chapters—chapter 10: 11: “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”. It is the way of divine love that is meant to lay hold of us and affect us.

I thought we might consider this morning how we come into that way of love as affected by the way of divine love, how we come into that same way. What has impressed me is this word ‘as’: “as I have done to you”. This is the first time in this gospel that this word ‘as’ occurs, as meaning ‘in like manner’, and by way of exhortation; there has been a setting out of divine love in these other chapters and we are to come into that way, as the way of love has been set out. It is not ‘what I have done to you’, although that is important; it is “as I have done to you”. We did not read the opening verses of chapter 13 (they are well known) but we ought to consider “as I have done to you”—in what manner the Lord performed this service. The chapter opens: “Jesus, knowing that his hour had come that he should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end”, loved them through everything. What a way of love this is! If it does not affect us, what will? We are exhorted to have our part in this same way of love. It says too: “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands, and that he came out from God and was going to God”—“all things into his hands”. What comes into His hands are the feet of the disciples, the first things that come into His hands. It is the way of love, dear brethren. Maybe we are not sufficiently affected, maybe we do not sufficiently contemplate, this way of love.

E.C.B. Would it come out in demonstration rather than in teaching? Even others say, besides the disciples, as in chapter 11: 36: “Behold how he loved him!” as to Lazarus.

J.R. That is right. Paul says in 1 Corinthians: “shew I unto you”, not just talk about it, but show. We need to show this kind of love, show that we have been affected by the way of divine love and come into it in our conduct.

D.J.H. It says in the epistle: “as *he* walked, himself also so to walk”, 1 John 2: 6. He walked in the way of love.

J.R. That is right, bringing Him from glory; not sent from heaven but coming of His own volition. “Lo, I come” to take up this way of love. There is nothing so affecting as love.

E.O.P.M. Love seems to take the initiative. Does love always take the initiative?

J.R. It has certainly taken the initiative in the Lord Jesus, in God the Father and the Spirit: it is a wonderful way of love we need to trace and be formed by.

J.C.E. I thought it was remarkable the way this reading has opened up. First we have the example in loving and then the injunction, and then it is bound upon us in commandment. I think we need to see it is bound upon us, not by way of a harsh, hard commandment of course, but because we have the power to keep it.

J.R. That is right. In his description of the washing the feet of the disciples John goes into great detail. The Lord Jesus, knowing certain things, “rises from supper and lays aside his garments, and having taken a linen towel he girded himself: then he pours water into the wash-hand basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the linen towel with which he was girded”. He came to each one and each one was the object of His attention and affection, one by one. He brought the wash-hand basin with Him and came to each one.

R.T. Is the bondman attitude or disposition a necessary part of showing this way of love?

J.R. I understand it was a custom in those days that, when a company were gathered, a slave would wash the feet of the persons present, but if no slave were available one of the company would take on that service. Jesus was the One who took on the service. It was the way of love. So affecting, is it not? It ought to touch us.

J.C.E. The Lord did not say to them ‘How soiled your feet have become, I must wash them’. He did not speak of that side at all. It is wonderful the way the Lord displays His love to us, perhaps even if we have been defiled.

J.R. Exactly. Love removes it and refreshment would be involved in it. I think the first mention of feet-washing is in Genesis 18, where Abraham proposes to fetch water that the three heavenly visitors may wash their feet. He says “refresh yourselves”, v 4. My impression, dear brethren, is that 2 Timothy 1: 16 is an example of a feet-washer, that is Onesiphorus. It says “he has often refreshed me, and has not been ashamed of my chain; but being in Rome sought me out very diligently, and found me”. Onesiphorus went to Paul the prisoner with a purpose, and that was to refresh him. I believe much can be accomplished by this simple service of love. It is only as we are deeply affected by the way of divine love that we will be able to undertake this service.

E.P. Is there a certain personal tenderness about the service? It is not arbitrary and there is regard for the person who is being served.

J.R. That is right. It is a personal service of love. When the Lord was washing Andrew’s feet He was not washing John’s feet; it was Andrew’s feet. Andrew would get an impression of how the Lord loved him, so would John, so would each one.

E.C.B. Mr A J Gardiner used to remark the way in which John’s mind would go over the person of the Lord: “In the beginning was the Word”, ‘and He washed my feet’. Very blessed, is it not?

J.R. It is indeed.

E.C.B. Luke 7 brings out that the prime purpose of feet-washing is refreshment, because you could not think of any need for removal of defilement in Jesus.

J.R. Nor with the three heavenly visitors in Genesis 18.

E.C.B. I wonder sometimes whether we put the other side first when it is the side of refreshment that comes first; and your reference to Onesiphorus—“he has often refreshed me”—is really the burden of it in the Scripture.

J.R. Yes. There was purpose with the Lord in washing the feet; it was not incidental, it was not casual. Of course, we can have our feet washed casually and incidentally, but this is the Lord coming to each one with a definite purpose. I think if we were able to go to one another, visit one another, with this purpose, much could be effected.

C.G.H. There is a basic reason why we love: “*We* love because he has first loved us”, 1 John 4: 19. What you are bringing before us now is that we might love Him as He has loved us. Is not that a beautiful thought? Does it not bring the Lord’s affection so much before us?

J.R. Yes, that is what we have later in the chapter: “A new commandment I give to you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you”. “As I have loved you”: how was that? It is the way of love as set out in these early chapters. “As I have loved you”: lifted up, crucified on our account, taking our place as sinners; the Father loving and giving; the Spirit indwelling. I think we need to be affected by tracing the way of love. “As I have loved you” was not with partiality, with special friends. Did He not wash the feet of every disciple? It would appear that He even washed the feet of Judas. He washed the feet of Peter, who was somewhat rebellious: “Thou shalt never wash my feet”. Peter either thought his feet did not require to be washed or that it was too humble a service for the Lord to perform, but the Lord prevailed and washed the feet of each one.

F.R.T. Is there not something affecting in the Lord saying “one another’s feet”. It was not to be special to some; it is a circle of very deep affection, for each, as belonging to Christ.

J.R. “One another’s feet” is specially a local idea; at least it begins locally. The wash-hand basin is a small vessel that can be carried. “One another” means that we begin in our own locality.

F.R.T. The fact that Judas went out later in this chapter would make this circle all the more intimate and affectionate towards one another, do you think?

J.R. I think so. It looks as though the Lord washed Judas’s feet. Think of the Lord expending this service of love on Judas! Peter wanted to be washed all over, but the true believer is washed all over. The Lord says in verse 10: “He that is washed all over needs not to wash save his feet, but is wholly clean; and ye are clean, but not all”. Judas was not washed all over, but it appears that the Lord washed his feet.

J.McK. Is the laying aside of the garments part of the example? The Lord lays aside personal distinction. I wondered if what was in mind here was not the greatness of the One serving but those served.

J.R. Very good; each one was important in the Lord’s eyes, at least those who were real. But what I am impressed with is that the Lord did this with purpose, came to each one.

E.C. When the Lord sat down again, He said, “Do ye know what I have done to you?” Is that a question the Lord is asking each one of us now in the way of divine love?

J.R. I think so. “Do ye know what I have done to you?”

C.C.I. Does John particularly have in mind what is to be realised here if we are to enjoy the greatness of the truth in subsequent chapters?

J.R. Yes, the Lord has in mind “part with me”, part with Him in the testimony and part with Him in privilege; and the Lord’s washing of each one’s feet was necessary in view of this part with Him. I wondered whether, if there was more of this service, we would know more intimately part with one another. We go to meetings and we get refreshment in meetings; you may meet a brother in the street and get refreshment; but this is not exactly that. This is the feet-washer coming with purpose, visiting with purpose the one whose feet are to be washed. It is evidence of love but love in activity, and love for each one. We have a meeting every night in Edinburgh, and those of us who are retired very often go to every one, but I wonder if there is not a need for this personal service. I am just beginning to wonder about the need for this personal service, a visit with a purpose to one another. I think it would set us together in a fresh kind of way, a living kind of way. We are glad to see one another at the meetings, and make no mistake, I am not minimising the importance of meetings at all, but this service it seems to me, is a very important service. As I have said, we get refreshment in the meetings, we get refreshment meeting a brother casually, but this is the Lord going to each one each disciple, with a purpose. It is like visiting a brother or a sister with a purpose, and it seems to me it would set us together in affection.

E.C.B. That purpose that you speak of is what we often speak of as positive, is it not? It is to bring something of the Lord, or of God or of the Spirit, to the other person. Rivers of living water flowing out of his belly would enter into it, would it not?

J.R. I was thinking of that. You might say it is the lower affections moving towards one another horizontally.

E.C.B. It is the automatic organs; that kind of thing cannot help flowing out. I am struck by the connection with chapter 7: 38: “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”. That is the way feet would be washed, is it not?

J.R. Exactly. I believe that much can be accomplished in this service. The Lord says “I have given you an example that, as I have done to you, ye should do also”. Take account of each detail of the Lord’s movements here. He obviously had been to other disciples before He came to Peter, because it says “He comes therefore to Simon Peter”. He comes to each one with the purpose to refresh, to wash the feet of each one. I do not know if I am making myself clear about this matter of purpose. In a meeting we get our feet washed, and casually we might meet someone, we might invite someone for a meal and that is good, but this is going to a person, coming to someone.

J.M. I was wondering if the atmosphere of love here meant that the enemy has to go out, and whether what you have in mind might be particularly important at the present time when the enemy is active in destructive influences.

J.R. I am sure that is a fact; so that not only the young people need their feet washed and refreshed, but also older ones, we all do; even Paul needed it.

D.E.R. We need not to overlook defilement or the need of refreshment, but we need the wherewithal so that there might be the removal of anything which would hinder part with Christ in the sphere of privilege. That would test us as to whether we have the wherewithal.

J.R. Quite so. There is no overlooking of defilement, or of unrighteousness, in the way of love as set out in John’s gospel. In chapter 1: 29 there is the Taker-away of the sin of the world; “as Moses lifted up the serpent ... thus must the Son of man be lifted up” (chap 3: 14); “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son”, v 16. Defilement is not by any means overlooked in the way of divine love and it would not be overlooked either in the way of love we are speaking of. But there is need of this personal service to each one, a service with a purpose.

P.M. Can it be carried out only by each esteeming the other more excellent than himself? Unless I value my brother I shall never see the need to serve him.

J.R. That is a fact. It is very practical. We need to be affected by divine love, each one of us. Taking away the sin of the world was that tremendous transaction, sacrifice involved, removing every evidence of sin in God’s universe, so extensive: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up, that every one who believes on him”, every one. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him” is individual, because we come into the appreciation of the way of love individually. We are meant to be affected by it.

W.H.S. To be quite practical, does it imply that we do not necessarily have to wait for an invitation?

J.R. The disciples here did not invite the Lord; He came to Peter, He came to each one. It is coming with a definite purpose.

W.H.S. One would use wisdom as to how this could be undertaken. I speak only because I feel, when facing problems, that my stock of love is so low.

J.R. It is good to invite persons to the home; that is excellent: “Be not forgetful of hospitality” (Heb 13: 1); “hospitable one to another”, 1 Pet 4: 9. But this is not that exactly; John 13 has in mind a service of love to one another, visiting one, and so there is part with Christ in a closer way. “Part with me” was the result of the Lord’s washing the feet, and I think practical part with one another would result from this service being taken on.

F.R.T. This point of visiting is very important, because the Lord speaks of visiting persons in prison, and “ye have done it to me”, Matt 25: 40.

J.R. Quite so.

E.C.B. What was drawn attention to is important though, is it not? “Do ye know what I have done to you?” is individual. We tend to regard it as corporate, but it is individual, and what you are saying, and I think what also has been referred to, is that the stock comes in relation to our individual experience of the service of the Lord.

J.R. Surely.

M.A.J.T. This commandment that we should love one another: could you help me as to how I can still love believers from whom I have had to separate after a lifetime with them?

J.R. All I would say is that it begins with those who are available to us; ‘one another’ would be those who are available to us. It would not stop there for we are to have “love ... towards all the saints”, Eph 1: 15. I am sure we need to have every believer in our minds, but we begin by displaying it in loving one another, that is those who are available to us, locally initially. What do you say?

M.A.J.T. Thank you. It comes a little hard to me, because I still love them though I have left, but they think I have stopped loving them. How do we show it? that is my question. How do we show our love to other Christians?

J.R. We may be limited in how we can show it to other Christians, but we are not to be limited in showing our love to one another, to those who are available to us in the testimony. Nevertheless “love ... towards all the saints” ought to mark us, and I am sure we could do with a wider outlook in regard to all the Lord’s people. I think we tend to be restricted. In meetings for prayer we pray for our own locality and for those who are sick and the next locality, and we pray for those in fellowship in America and Australia, and think we have a universal outlook, and we are praying for a very, very small fraction of the Lord’s people. I think the Lord would have us thinking wider, thinking as He thinks. Every one is precious to Him. There are thousands of those who love Him and we would like to see them making progress.

R.T. Do you think that the way that Aquila and Priscilla spoke to Apollos would show a stock of love? He said something which was perhaps not altogether right, but they took him to them. They took him and washed his feet perhaps, showed him the way of God more exactly.

J.R. They took him to them with a purpose, a purpose of love.

R.E.T. “As I have done to you” is the way things are done. There may be correction needed, there may be discipline needed, but the way it is done would leave an impression of love that was always there.

J.R. The way of divine love never overlooked unrighteousness, never overlooked sin. We know what it cost the Lord Jesus, what it cost the Father to give His only-begotten Son, and the way of love with us would never overlook these things, but love for one another practically expressed is so important.

R.E.T. Is the way of love completed in the towel?

J.R. Quite so. It says He wiped their feet “with the linen towel with which he was girded”. John goes into so much detail. You can just see the Lord, shall I say, bending down to each one, and taking each one’s feet in His hands and washing them from the wash-hand basin, and then wiping them with the linen towel. What grace! What a wonderful service it is; does it not become attractive?

R.E.T. It is warmth and righteousness, is it not?

J.R. Yes, surely.

J.M. Do you think Paul was using the water in the first epistle to the Corinthians and the towel in the second. You need both, do you not, if persons are to be affected Godward? Then, the earlier part of this chapter shows the great antitype of Aaron with the precious stones representing the tribes on the breastplate. Do you think that really underlies this matter of feet-washing? The one would relate to what is up there; the other would relate to the practical side of what is down here.

J.R. Very good. As you were speaking I was thinking of how the Lord would leave each one. He would not leave each one with his feet wet. Each one would have the tender wiping with the linen towel. It is “as I have done to you”. We are to learn and appreciate the service of love to each one of us and take on that service in the way of love.

J.M. This may help us to have a right valuation of one another. Passages like Matthew 18 which is administrative would be filled out in the way of substance, do you think?

J.R. I think so. We are so unaccustomed to visiting one another without an invitation. I heard of one brother who went to see another one, and he thought he had come to see him on the basis of Matthew 18 because of something wrong. Feet-washing and intimately knowing and loving one another, and having a touch with one another, going with a purpose as we are able, would set us together.

E.C.B. This in fact is normality. Matthew 18 is to meet abnormality.

J.R. Quite so. We possibly know more of the abnormality than we do of the normality, I mean in practice.

E.C.B. I think your last remark is of very wide application - we know more about abnormality than we know about normality - and John’s writings are intended to secure normality amongst believers.

J.R. Yes. The Lord came very close to each one, He became very intimate with each one. Each one would be very conscious of being loved. There is no influence greater than the influence of being loved.

W.J.R.B. The Lord had come from the Father’s presence in the previous chapter. He speaks of having been with the Father.

J.R. Yes, and He knows that He is going to the Father, to “depart out of this world to the Father”, and “knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands, and that he came out from God and was going to God”. It is in view of His absence, in view of His going to the Father, that the Lord sets this example, that “as I have done to you ye should do also”.

R.W.F. Does the way of love involve movement? The attention by the Lord to the disciples’ feet had in view that they might move, under His influence, towards one another, as we have been saying.

J.R. That is important. ‘Feet’ involves movement, with Him, part with Him.

F.C.M. Is it not of the greatest importance that our feet are moving in the way of love; we are walking in the same steps, and walking together. If a brother comes to me and washes my feet it will powerfully affect my feet from straying into a way which will not be pleasing to the Lord.

J.R. Very good. So it is also preventive. There is a preventive service in it. That is important. I am glad you have called attention to it.

B.W.W. You have drawn attention to the fact that this was individual service, which is so clear as regards the disciples, but it was in the presence of all of them. Would you say a little as to that aspect of it in the application that you are making.

J.R. Yes, they were all there, it appears. Yet the Lord comes to each one, and each one individually is the object of His attention and His affection at the moment. As I said, when He is washing Andrew’s feet He is not washing John’s feet, and it would seem that it had an effect upon John, because for the first time he speaks of himself, in verse 23, as the disciple whom Jesus loved, as if he received a deep impression of the love of Jesus. What is going to preserve us is our consciousness of being loved, not exactly our love. Of course, we cannot but respond to that love, but the consciousness of being loved is going to keep us.

H.A.H. Paul speaks about the “little esteemed in the assembly”, 1 Cor 6: 4. If we saw the Lord wash such an one’s feet, he would go up in our esteem very greatly.

J.R. Yes, that is right.

S.D.K.R. Would this consciousness of being loved be conveyed in the visit that you are referring to?

J.R. I think so. John was sustained in view of ministry for us in the last days; what sustained him, I think, was the sense of being loved. Coming under the influence of divine love will beget responsive love, but Peter, later in the chapter, boasted of his love. He loved the Lord, there is no doubt about it. He says “I will lay down my life for thee” (v 37), and Peter meant it, but what governed John was his consciousness of being loved.

D.J.H. It would always involve sacrifice. I feel for myself that that is where the test comes.

J.R. Yes. It would not take too long to wash each person’s feet. This is not spending an hour and a half. It would be a brief service; it would be a few minutes, I suppose, but so effective. We used to have a Mr Newlands in our city (the older brethren would remember him) and he used to visit the household, stay twenty minutes and go away; just kept a fatherly touch with the households in the locality. That has been missing, at least I speak for myself. It is not so prevalent as it used to be.

E.C.B. Are not feet washed by the single remark, “Let not your hearts be troubled”, John 14: 1? I wondered, with regard to verse 34 which you read, whether the standard has not been raised now. “As I have loved you” refers to what they had known of Jesus up to that point, but since then He has laid down His life for us.

J.R. That is right. The chapter opens with the Lord departing out of this world to the Father, going to God, and He gives them a new commandment, because they would find themselves in new circumstances. They would find themselves without the Lord, but they had one another. We have, dear brethren, one another, those who are available to us at the moment. Let us make the most of them, let us get the best out of them. We can get the worst out of one another easily, but we can get the best out of one another. This is one of the ways it can be accomplished.

E.P. Would you think that Anna in the principle of it moved on this line, because she spoke of Him? It raises the question as to what the conversation is when I visit someone. She spoke of Him. To whom? “To all those who waited for redemption in Jerusalem”, Luke 2: 38.

J.R. Very good. If you visit a household, do not preach at the young people. You maybe ask how they are getting on at school, how they are getting on in employment; you get their confidence.

F.G.M. Would a visit such as you describe prevent a crisis arising?

J.R. Exactly. And if a crisis arose it would be soon solved if there was this “part with me” and vital part with one another.

F.G.M. Such a visit brings refreshment to the one visiting, too.

J.R. It does indeed.

E.O. Peter speaks of the Lord as a model, “that ye should follow in his steps”, 1 Pet 2: 21. This would be included, would it not?

J.R. Surely. It depends on how we are affected by the way of divine love.

To refer now to chapter 15: “As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you”; think of that kind of love. The Lord Jesus, in washing the feet of the disciples, was loving them as the Father loved Him. We need to be reminded of divine standards: “As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you: abide in my love. If ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love”.

D.E.R. That is love not on a natural level, nor on a social level. It is love really at the level of the mystery.

J.R. It is “As the Father has loved me I also have loved you”. He says “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you”. It is a repetition of what He says in chapter 13, as if the Lord is concerned in leaving the disciples.

B.W.W. You referred to John as continuing. Do we get an example of his consciousness of the maintained love of Jesus in Revelation 1: 5? “To him who loves us”; he had a current sense of the love of Jesus then.

J.R. There is nothing more influential than maintained consciousness by the Spirit of the love of Jesus. Then “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit”, Rom 5: 5. “Keep yourselves in the love of God”, Jude 21. That is how we are going to be kept and get through and then loving one another. We have fewer available to us than we used to have. There is great need to value and appreciate each one more, to get the best out of each one.

B.W.W. I am sure that is right. The practice of it may test me, but it is right, because if the best is drawn out there will be more for the Lord, and that is really the primary thing.

J.R. It tests every one of us, but it tests us as to our appreciation of the way of divine love, how we are formed by it.

E.C.B. Does this practical side that you are speaking of help us to understand Peter’s reference to being “partakers of the divine nature”, 2 Pet 1: 4? That is a profound scripture, but the divine nature is love. “As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you”: we should love one another on that pattern, but it is the divine nature coming into expression, and that formation in us is what God is really concerned with, is it not?

J.R. Quite so. That is what is going to go through. We might have read from chapter 17, which is even more testing I suppose. Let us refer to it for a moment. “I come to thee”, the Lord says to the Father; “Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one as we” (v 11)—“as we”. He says also, twice, “they are not of the world, as I am not of the world”, vv 14, 16. I think this “as”, this like manner, tests us, but it is the Lord’s request in John 17. Then when He comes to “those who believe on me through their word” He seems to intensify His desire for unity: “I do not demand for these only, but also for those who believe on me through their word” (that would extend to the Gentiles, ourselves) “that they may be all one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us”, vv 20, 21. It is this like manner. Let us have regard to the Lord’s own expressed desires to the Father in this chapter.

In 1 Corinthians we have the Supper in chapter 11. It is quite a test as to what practical effect the Supper has on us. The Supper certainly presents to us the way of divine love, and it is a sad thing if we are at loggerheads with one another and go to the Supper and there is no change. What effect has the way of love had upon us? “This is my body, which is for you”, He says, chap 11: 24.

S.D.K.R. Would we lose the sense of the Lord’s presence under those circumstances? If we are at loggerheads, as you say, with one another, would we have a sense of the Lord’s presence at the Supper?

J.R. Discerning the Lord’s presence is a matter of great sensitiveness. There was a sister in Edinburgh in 1908 who was sick during the difficulties. She knew nothing about the division. She came to the meeting she usually came to; at the end of the meeting she said, What has happened? the Lord was not here this morning. That is sensitiveness. We tend to go on presuming that because we are in a certain fellowship the Lord will come to us. The Lord comes to where there is affection and where there are right conditions.

E.O. Would the scripture “let a man prove himself, and thus eat” help to set us free?

J.R. The Lord Jesus comes to self-judged persons, persons who judge themselves, or as you say prove themselves, or examine themselves in the light of the Lord’s love.

E.P. In a different connection there is an expression in the Proverbs that says “where love is”: “Better is a meal of herbs where love is” (chap 15: 17), but the Supper would normally be where love is. Does not the Lord delight to manifest Himself where love is?

J.R. That is right. We passed a Jewish synagogue not long ago where there was a text: “Better is a meal of vegetables where love is, than a fatted ox and hatred therewith”. I am not too fond of vegetables, so it was a word for me anyway. But it is a fact: better is a little where love is, than much and hatred therewith.

D.E.B. Love springs from the heart, not from the head. These things have to be spontaneous rather than worked out. I was thinking of the end of chapter 12 which you read. There is a desire which is right, and I suppose that comes, in part at least, from the mind, but the “way of more surpassing excellence” is additional to the desire. There is something better.

J.R. Exactly. We get the way of love set out in chapter 11 in the Supper. We have every week this way of love. Paul says “yet shew I unto you”, show I unto you; he is affected by the presentation of the way of love in the Supper and he shows them, not only talks about it, but “shew I unto you a way of more surpassing excellence”. That is the way of love that is open to every one of us.

R.T. Following after love would involve that it is in the lead, would it not? The Supper, following it up, and enjoying it there, would come into the prayer meeting and other meetings: “Follow after love”.

J.R. I am sure that is right.

J.M. The way of love is really a manner of life, is it not? It is what is set out every day, do you think?

J.R. Quite so.

W.H.S. Paul did not always find it easy, did he? “I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls, if even in abundantly loving you I should be less loved”, 2 Cor 12: 15. There is another side, is there not, to the attractiveness of what you are saying? It may test you or me enormously.

J.R. Yes, the Corinthians were not all they ought to be. The Supper is meant to affect us more than it does. It is meant to affect me more than it does. We have the privilege of being loved by Jesus and responding to Him. May we be preserved from that occasion being a mere formality. We are particular as to the order of the service and that kind of thing, which is right in its place, but the effect of it needs to be more and more with us. Chapter 13 comes in and Paul goes over the features of love, and many of them are what love is not. There is more said about what love is not than what it is. “Love has long patience, is kind”, v 4. That is very positive. “Is not emulous of others ... is not insolent and rash, is not puffed up, does not behave in an un­seemly manner, does not seek what is its own, is not quickly provoked, does not impute evil, does not rejoice at iniquity”. These negative features are features that we need to judge. They are very close to us; they are in us in fact, but we are to judge what love is not and come into this way of love in a practical way. He goes on to say: “rejoices with the truth, bears” (I think it is ‘covers’, see note) “all things, believes all things”. Love would cover all that can righteously be covered. Peter says “love covers a multitude of sins”, 1 Pet 4: 8. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails”. I do not think that that means that love always succeeds. If you take the context, it says “Love never fails; but whether prophecies, they shall be done away; or tongues, they shall cease; or knowledge, it shall be done away”, but love is not done away with and love does not cease. Love goes through into eternity. That is the idea. It is not that love is always successful.

J.M. Does it mean it does not run out? Is that the idea?

J.R. Exactly. I understand Mr Darby’s French version is, Love never perishes or decays (*l’amour ne perit jamais*).

C.C.I. Does it involve maturity? It says “when I became a man, I had done with what belonged to the child”, v 11. Do you think maturity and manhood is one of the great points that Paul is aiming at? We would get near to one another in a manly way, not in a childish way.

J.R. Very good. There is a great need of this kind of manhood, and love would be a feature of manhood according to God. We need to grow in this, be formed in it. Love involves some formation; it is the result of the appreciation of the way of divine love. That is the standard.

D.J.H. So it says “if I ... have not love, I am nothing”, v 2. I was thinking of the word in Proverbs: “that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance”, chap 8: 21. It is substantial.

J.R. Very good. These opening verses: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains” (these would be desirable features, in one sense) “but have not love, I am nothing. And if I shall dole out all my goods in food, and if I deliver up my body that I may be burned, but have not love, I profit nothing”. We know all this by heart, we used to learn it at school, but the great thing is to be formed in love.

E.C.B. These things are complementary to, and the working out of, what you spoke about in an address on a previous occasion, the references to “in love”; “holy and blameless before him in love”. Quite simply, it is no good claiming that if this side of things is not there.

J.R. That is a fact.

M.A.J.T. Does Jesus command us to do anything else besides loving Him? He does not command us to be at the Supper, or command us to be baptised, does He?

J.R. Paul says in chapter 14: “If any one thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognise the things that I write to you, that it is the Lord’s commandment”, v 37. That would include the Supper, I suppose. It is a request, of course, but any request He makes, any expressed desire the Lord has ought to become commandment to us. If we are affected by the way of love it would be regarded as obligatory. It would not be optional.

M.A.J.T. It would not be the ten commandments, would it? Nor the sermon on the mount.

J.R. These are practical things. The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit (see Rom 8: 4) but we are not under law. It is not by way of demand; it is by reason of being affected by the way of divine love.

D.J.H. But the righteous requirement of the law (singular) is love, really, is it not?

J.R. It is.

P.M. Would the way we assemble at the Supper, view the emblems and view one another, affect us?

J.R. It is meant to affect us.

S.D.K.R. Had you something in mind in the word ‘follow’ after love?

J.R. It would be our intention. You gave us something about it, will you say again what you said before.

R.T. I just thought that whatever is to be done, love is the motive. It is the power. I was thinking that “as I have done to you” would come into the emblems. Seeing the emblems we would be reminded of “as I have done to you”.

J.R. Quite so. Sacrificial love could affect me more.

R.W.F. Is the word “Follow after love” addressed to all the saints, regardless of stature? Do you think we are to view love as that which is to be pursued, that in which we are to grow, not a point reached, but there is room for us all to be more formed in it?

J.R. Quite so. “Follow after love” leads to prophecy. How am I going to give a word in the meeting for ministry? How does it come about? It comes through following after love, that you love the saints and would love to say something to edify them, therefore you seek a word in the meeting for ministry. That is one example. It comes by way of following after love which comes through being affected by the way of divine love.

E.C.B. Does 2 Timothy 2 bind these things together? “Pursue ... love ... with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart” (v 22). That is, the company that is available is especially an area in which you can pursue—“righteousness, faith, love”.

J.R. I think so. Those available to us we ought to appreciate and to value; not to exclude all believers but to make the most and get the best out of those who are available to us, and they are very few. There were very few, I suppose, when the Lord left the disciples here. There were not great numbers.

J.R.B. I think all this is very measuring, as to how we have been affected by the way the Lord has moved in relation to us. You referred to the Supper; what a lever it is for our affections, the first occasion in the week as though everything, all our movements, all our activities, flow out of that. Sacrifice has entered into it; how have I been affected by that in my own pathway?

J.R. Very important. You know what it is in Vancouver. We are to know how it is worked out in each of our localities; we begin there.

**LONDON**

**20th June 1987**

**Key to initials**

D.E.Burr, Redbridge; E.C.Burr; J.R.Bellamy, Vancouver; W.J.R.Brodie, Ealing; E.Croot, Dorking; J.C.Evershed; R.W.Flowerdew; C.G.Hitchcock, Ealing; D.J.Hutson; H.A.Hutson; C.C.lkin, Southend; E.O.P.Mutton, Walton; F.C.Mutton, Redbridge; F.G.May, Maidstone; J.Mitchell, Bexley; J.McKay, Woodstock; P.Martin, Colchester; E.Oliver; E.Palmer; D.E.Remmington, St.Albans; J.Renton, Edinburgh; S.D.K.Roberts, Croydon; W.H.Shephard, Bedford; F.R.Turner, Bournemouth· M.A.J.Terry; R.Taylor, Barnet; R.E.Turner, Bexley; B.W.Ward

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# “IF ANYONE SERVE ME”

**John 12: 26; 1: 35-41; 9: 11, 12, 34-38; 13: 21-25; 17: 24**

I would like to say a few words about this verse in John 12. The Lord said, “If any one serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there also shall be *my* servant”. The Lord does not say, ‘Where My servant is, there will I be’; but “where I am, there also shall be my servant”. That is the consequence of serving the Lord Jesus and following Him. The two in chapter 1, who had been disciples of John, were where He was on the basis of desire. It would be a good thing if each one of us desired to be where the Lord is. It does not require long experience; these were two persons who had been disciples of John and immediately they became followers of Jesus; they had not been a long time on the road. This is open to every one of us, dear brethren.

They heard John speaking and they followed Jesus, and they came under the notice of Jesus. They became interested, and I would urge every one here to become interested. We can come to meetings, and be in fellowship, and not really be interested. We can have one foot among the brethren and the other foot in the world. It is a great matter to become interested. There is nothing more interesting than the truth, the Scriptures, the will of God, and to answer to the desires of the Lord Jesus for us. There is nothing more worth being committed to; we begin by being interested.

John said, “Behold the Lamb of God”. Then “the two disciples heard him speaking, and followed Jesus. But Jesus having turned, and seeing them following ...”. If you become interested, dear friend, you will come under the Lord’s notice; He will take account of you, and He will help you with all the help you need. We begin our Christian way by becoming interested, as these persons were. “Jesus having turned, and seeing them following, says to them, What seek ye?” What a question that is! What a question for each one of us here! What is your object, your purpose in life? What seek ye? The remarkable answer is, “Rabbi … where abidest thou?” They become interested in where the Lord is. Jesus says to them, “Come and see”. To anyone who has this desire, how helpful He will be. “Come and see”, He said. “They went therefore, and saw where he abode”, and not only saw where He abode, but, “they abode with him that day”. “Where I am, there also shall be my servant”; these two had the privilege of being with the Lord in His own home. What a privilege to be where the Lord is! May it become more and more attractive to every one of us.

Here we have two followers who have just set out on the pathway, and they have the privilege of spending some hours where the Lord is. What impressions they would receive! Andrew was one of the two; John does not tell us who the other is; I have no doubt it was John himself. Andrew is set in movement immediately. It says, “Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard this from John and followed him. He first finds his own brother Simon”; Andrew is immediately in movement, commendable movement, seeking his brother and saying, “We have found the Messias”. That was experience; that was not just knowledge, it was experience; “We have found the Messias”. What a satisfied man Andrew was! He was one of the two; the other one was John I suppose. We do not hear again of John until chapter 13.

I desire now to speak about chapter 9 where we have the man who was born blind. “Jesus answered, Neither has this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be manifested in him”, John 9: 3. It is remarkable how the works of God were manifested in this man. His confession was very simple, there was nothing complicated in his statement, he simply says, “A man called Jesus”. I wonder if we all know “A man called Jesus”? Have we all had experience with “A man called Jesus”? How simple it is! “A man called Jesus”, he said, “made mud and anointed mine eyes, and said to me, Go to Siloam and wash: and having gone and washed, I saw”. This was experience. They asked him, “Where is he? He says, I do not know”; there were certain things he did not know, but he knew enough; he knew he had had experience with “A man called Jesus”. I would like to make this attractive to every person here, “A man called Jesus”. Do you know Him? Have you had experience with Him? What transformed this man’s life was his experience with “A man called Jesus”. How attractive it is! How simple it is! He was obedient; he became a follower by being obedient. That is a very important matter. Interest and desire are important, as in John 1, but being obedient is also a very important matter. We were speaking about knowing Jesus as Master and being obedient to, and serviceable to, the Master. I think He is the Master to individuals, each one being subject to the Master. The man says here, “having gone and washed, I saw”. He did not know where He was, but he is true to his impression of the Lord Jesus. The neighbours have to do with him, the Pharisees, the Jews, and his parents, but he stands firm in his impression of “A man called Jesus”. Think of the works of God appearing testimonially in this man. Nothing could shake him. The result was that they cast him out.

We sang—

Thou abidest in the bosom

Of the Father’s love.

In principle that is what the two disciples saw in chapter 1. But where is He in this chapter 9? He is in the outside place; He is outside the camp. We are exhorted, “let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach”, Heb 13: 13. In chapter 8 of John the Lord was under great reproach, it says, “They took up therefore stones that they might cast them at him” (John 8: 59)—outside, He was totally rejected and opposed. It says, Jesus “went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and thus passed on”. The Lord is outside; outside the camp; that is where the Lord is publicly now. “If anyone serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall be *my* servant”. That includes being outside the camp. Just as the Lord was under reproach and opposed in chapter 8, this man had the same experience of being under reproach, and opposed. The Lord, in chapter 8, was an embarrassment to these religious people; in chapter 9 the man became an embarrassment. They took up stones to cast at Jesus in chapter 8, and the Jews cast this man out in chapter 9, and he found where the Lord was, “Where I am”, outside of all religious pretension; he was where the Man called Jesus was.

It says, “And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out”. The Lord is absent in all these verses; the man never saw Jesus because he was blind, but he was obedient; he had a personal experience, and he is faithful to his impression of the Man called Jesus; he stands in testimony, resolutely, then he is cast out, and Jesus heard that they had cast him out. “And having found him”; the Lord found him where He was, outside the camp. Hebrews speaks in chapter 10 of the holiest, inside; that would correspond with chapter 1, what the two experienced; they would be in principle inside the veil. This man is outside the camp bearing the reproach of the Lord Jesus; not in the popular line of men’s thinking, but outside of all that—“Where I am, there also shall be *my* servant”. May it become attractive to every one of us. The inside position is privilege; we go inside to contemplate; and along with that goes the public position of being outside the camp. One of the two in chapter 1 was Andrew, and he becomes immediately in movement. I think I am right in presuming that the other one was John. I believe John was a contemplator. He tells us in chapter 1—“we have contemplated his glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father”, John 1: 14. I suppose he saw something of that when they saw where the Lord abode, and abode with Him that day; I suppose he got an initial impression of the glory of “an only-begotten with a father”. He tells us in his epistle, “that which we contemplated”; he speaks about, “the eternal life, which was with the Father”, 1 John 1: 1, 2. John was a contemplator. We need both; we need movement, as with Andrew; Andrew was right in being active; but along with that we need the ability, and to take time, to contemplate. That is how John appears. At the beginning of chapter 13 it says, “Jesus, knowing that his hour had come that he should depart out of this world to the Father”, John 13: 1. How did John know that? Again in verse 3, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands”. How did John know what was in the Lord’s mind at that moment? It was because he was near to Him; because he was a contemplator. I believe—I can take it to myself—we do not spend enough time contemplating, letting things sink in. That is how John is in chapter 1 and he does not appear again till chapter 13. Andrew appears in chapter 1, chapter 6 and chapter 12; but not John until chapter 13. He presents himself in chapter 13 as the disciple whom Jesus loved; he is in His bosom, “where I am, there also shall be *my* servant”.

Think of John in the bosom of Jesus. It says, “Now there was at table one of the disciples in the bosom of Jesus, whom Jesus loved”. What a place of privilege, and not only privilege, but in the place of knowing what is in the Lord’s mind. The Lord is troubled here regarding Judas; it says, “Jesus was troubled in spirit”; some things were concerning the Lord here. One who is in the bosom of Jesus would not only know the privilege of being there, but be acquainted with how the Lord felt about things. Would it be fair to say that maybe there are some things among us at the moment that the Lord is concerned about? I think there may be some things the Lord is concerned about. I wonder if we are near enough to Him to know what concerns Him, what He is thinking about things. He longs to see unity. Does He not go over that in John 17 where testimony and unity are the subject? No doubt that prayer was answered at Pentecost, but the Lord would still long to see unity, especially among those who are available at the moment, the few who are available. They are a very, very small percentage of all the Lord has on the earth, for He has many. He would expect that the few who are available would be in unity; I am sure He would, and He would feel it if it is not so. John was near enough, as in His bosom, to know what was in the Lord’s mind according to the opening verses, and then to know what troubled Him, what He was concerned about. He was in the bosom of Jesus, that is a resting place; and then it says too that he was “leaning on the breast of Jesus”—“But he, leaning on the breast of Jesus, says to him, Lord, who is it?” He was the one who got the answer. This was privilege, to be in the bosom of Jesus, to be near enough to be on the breast of Jesus, and to know what the Lord’s thoughts were about matters current at that moment. We can be near enough to the Lord to know what His thoughts are about matters current at the moment in which we are.

“Where I am, there also shall be my servant”. May He become attractive to us; may we become exercised, every one of us, to know what is in the Lord’s mind. We are quite sure of what is in our minds; some of us can be very definite as to what is in our minds, maybe not so sure of what is in the Lord’s mind. May the Lord encourage us.

In chapter 21 John is following. The Lord says to Peter, “Follow me”. “And having said this, he says to him, Follow me. Peter, turning round, sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also leaned at supper on his breast, and said, Lord, who is it that delivers thee up?” How intimate John was; a characteristic follower. I suppose there are such; I believe there are such amongst us, characteristically followers, as John was. “Peter, seeing him, says to Jesus, Lord, and what of this man?” There was John as a follower, a model, an example to Peter. It was an advantage to Peter to have one who was a characteristic follower; it was an advantage to the Lord to be able to point out one who was a characteristic follower.

May the Lord help us in this. The Lord said also, “And if anyone serve me, him shall the Father honour”. How wonderful that is! Think of the Father’s honour bestowed on the Lord Jesus! How worthy He is of honour and glory, but this verse in John 17 could be interpreted as the Lord’s request that the Father might honour His own by being “with me”, “where I am”. This is, I suppose, future in its fulness; it is the Lord requesting that the Father honour persons who have served and who have followed. Think of the honour; listen to it—“I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world”. What an honour to be initiated into the Father’s thoughts of the Lord Jesus! I suppose it is future in its fulness, but we can get some impressions now of the Father honouring persons who serve the Lord Jesus—“with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world”. My glory is not a particular glory. The Lord speaks in this chapter about particular glories. In verse 5, for instance, “and now glorify *me*, *thou* Father, along with thyself, with the glory which I had along with thee before the world was”, is a particular glory. Then again in verse 22, “And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them”, is a particular glory; but in verse 24 it is “my glory”, which is a wonderful expression. There is a fulness about it. “If anyone serve me … him shall the Father honour”. The Father would honour such now; He will certainly honour such in the future, answering the Lord’s request that “where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world”.

I trust I have given some impression of the Lord’s own words, “If anyone serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall be my servant. And if anyone serve me, him shall the Father honour”. May these truths become increasingly attractive to us, for the Lord’s own Name’s sake.

**REDBRIDGE**

**14th January 1989**

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# THE LORD JESUS AS PROPHET

**John 4: 15-19; 9: 15-17**

I desire, dear brethren, to say a short word about the Lord Jesus as Prophet. We have the light of the Lord Jesus as Prophet, Priest and King; we would hold tenaciously to that truth; but the two persons in these chapters experienced the Lord Jesus as Prophet; they spoke from experience, which is deeper, fuller, and more important, than having light. It would be good for every one of us to have experience of the Lord Jesus as Prophet.

In chapter 4 we have a situation that we speak of as moral, having to do with good and evil. In the universe there is the problem of good and evil, which will yet be solved. Good eventually will triumph and evil will be confined to its own place. The problem of good and evil is worked out in the universe, but it has to be worked out in the soul history of every one of us. This is how the Prophet appears in this beautiful incident at Sychar’s well. Sitting by the well was the Lord Jesus and this woman came. He said to her, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water”, John 4: 10. He gained her interest but had difficulty in gaining her confidence. No matter what the Lord said, she had something to counteract it, because to the woman He was a complete stranger. But eventually the woman said, “Sir, give me this water”. Then, “Jesus says to her, Go, call thy husband, and come here”.

After setting before her so attractively the glad tidings of the gift of living water He raised the moral question. “Go, call thy husband, and come here”. “The woman answered and said, I have not a husband”. Jesus said to her, “Thou hast well said, I have not a husband; for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom now thou hast is not thy husband: this thou hast spoken truly. The woman says to him, Sir, I see that thou art a prophet”. She had to do with the Lord Jesus as Prophet. She says later, “Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done”. She did not tell Him all things she had ever done—He told her all things she had ever done, therefore she knew that she had come under divine scrutiny and all her sinful history was settled. He told her all things she had ever done; she faced the exposure of her whole moral course. That is what the Lord Jesus would help us to do. The Lord as Prophet would help us to face our whole history, not only to our satisfaction but to His own satisfaction. Things she did not have on her conscience the Lord put on her conscience to settle her conscience; everything she had done was out. What a great matter this is! She becomes evangelical; she is able to say to the very men she knew before, “Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done”. Her heart was filled with Christ. She had experienced Him as the Prophet. I wonder if we have all undergone this experience, because it is available for every one of us. It is a great matter to be settled in our conscience and have a settled Object for our heart as this woman had. “All things I had ever done”, are all cleared, “Come, see a man”. All she could speak about was the Man whom she had to do with individually.

This is the Lord as Prophet when He was here, but He is not here now. He looks for the very features that were expressed by Him as Prophet when here to operate at the present time. In a meeting like this, as is described in 1 Corinthians 14, we would expect what is prophetic, which really means a representation of the Lord Himself. He is not here personally, but the character of what came out in Him here is to be found in meetings of this character. It says, “If therefore the whole assembly come together in one place, and all speak with tongues … will not they say ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and some unbeliever or simple person come in, he is convicted of all, he is judged of all; the secrets of his heart are manifested; and thus, falling upon his face, he will do homage to God, reporting that God is indeed amongst you”, 1 Cor 14: 23-25. It is God’s presence known by His word. That is what we would expect in an occasion like this.

But actually this incident in John 4 was not a meeting for ministry; it was a personal interview between the Lord Jesus and this woman, more personal than an occasion like this. We often take advantage, and possibly rightly so, of an occasion like this to speak to persons whom we know need help. We often do so in the preaching; but how often do we get alongside by personal contact to help such persons? That is a greater challenge. We have gone through the gospel of Matthew recently endeavouring to get a better understanding of kingdom and assembly principles, one of which is “between thee and him alone”, Matt l8: 15. I raise the matter with us, dear brethren, for we may not do enough by personal contact. Paul at Ephesus for three years not only taught publicly, but in every house. He also said, “Wherefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears” (Acts 20: 31); that is not in the meeting, that is personal contact, “each one of you with tears”. I just raise the question; maybe we could do more by personal contact, bringing in something prophetic to help a person where he or she may be at the moment. I am sure it is an important matter. May the Lord help us in it.

The Lord Jesus as Prophet has not only to do with what is moral, because the moral question does not come in with regard to the man in John 9. The Lord said regarding him, “Neither has this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be manifested in him” (John 9: 3), and, oh, see how the works of God were manifested in him! What a remarkable man he was! and the context in which he said, “He is a prophet” was in answer to the question as to how he received his sight. The Lord as Prophet would give us sight; He would enable us to see things as He sees them. You see how faithful this man was in the sight he received from the Prophet. He is like the Lord Himself. In chapter 8 the Lord is opposed. The chapter ends with, “They took up therefore stones that they might cast them at him”, John 8: 59. The Lord was speaking as Prophet in chapter 8, unappreciated, not listened to. How patiently the Lord answered all the questions of the opposers in chapter 8. He was the Prophet with the word and He was refused; they took up stones to cast at Him.

This man in the ninth chapter is also opposed, and he answers all the questions that were put to him by his opposers. His neighbours are mentioned, the Jews, the Pharisees, and the parents. He answered them all. What happened? They cast him out. They took up stones to cast at Jesus in chapter 8, and they cast this man out in chapter 9. The Lord was outside; we might say, outside the camp, and this man who had been blind was where the Lord was. The Lord is outside the camp in chapter 8. It says, “They took up therefore stones that they might cast them at him; but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and thus passed on”. He was outside the religious organisation of men; this man finds himself in the same position. The Prophet would help us to find the way of righteousness in the public confusion of Christendom and to find Him outside the camp. He said Himself in chapter 17, “They are not of the world, as I am not of the world”, John 17: 16. This man in chapter 9 would be one such. In chapter 10 the Lord speaks of the flock, in which this man would find where he belonged. He would see his way by the help of the Lord Jesus as Prophet. Oh, how tender He is, how patient with every one of us that we might know, by experience, the solution of our whole moral histories and receive sight, thus being directed to be where He is and to find the flock, “Therefore let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach”, Heb 13: 13. This man certainly bore the same reproach as Jesus bore in chapter 8. The Lord Himself was an embarrassment to the Jews in chapter 8, and this man was an embarrassment in chapter 9; he could not fit into any organisation of this world.

Dear brethren, let us know, let us experience, what the Lord can be to us as Prophet. He is able to solve the moral history and lead us to find where He is, going forth to Him. “Let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach”. “To him” is not the Lord in heaven; it refers to the Lord somewhere down here; we need the sight which the Prophet would give us to find where He is at the present time, although there is public confusion, and fragmented conditions. I can assure you, and many here would assure you, that the Lord is somewhere. He is to be found. We need the sight which He would give, and is willing to give. May the Lord help us, therefore; may He encourage us, for His own Name’s sake.

**EDINBURGH**

**17th January 1989**

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# GARRISONS

**2 Samuel 8: 5, 6; 13, 14**

**2 Chronicles 17: 1, 2**

I desire to say a few words about garrisons. In chapter 8 of 2 Samuel David is establishing his kingdom which involved the subjugation of certain elements. We have in this chapter the whole extent of the kingdom under David, going to the Euphrates, over which Solomon his son reigned afterwards. At the end of the chapter we have David’s cabinet; he “reigned over all Israel: and David executed judgment and justice to all his people”, and his officers in the kingdom are named. In the next chapter we have the demonstration of grace. The kingdom is protective and is based on righteousness, but the mode of operation is grace. David said, “Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul” (v 1), and there was Mephibosheth. Grace on the part of David was appreciated by Mephibosheth, and he came into the value of David’s kingdom. In the corresponding passage in 1 Chronicles 18 we have the same kind of subjugation taking place, David’s cabinet established and David reigning over all Israel, and there was the going out of grace towards the new king of the children of Ammon, but that overture of grace was despised. The fact that the kingdom of God is established at the present time is of great benefit to men. The Lord Jesus sitting with His Father on His throne is a position of favour for men because of the going out of the glad tidings. Mephishobeth appreciated and came into the joy of sonship, eating at the king’s table, but in 1 Chronicles 19 the same grace goes out, the same compassion and sympathy, but they are not appreciated. That is the setting at the present time.

I desire, however, to speak about garrisons. Garrisons are put in Syria of Damascus and in Edom. These are the only two places in this chapter where there are garrisons. After the putting of the garrisons in these places it says, twice over, “Jehovah preserved David whithersoever he went”. The idea of a garrison is a very important matter. We have first of all to garrison ourselves, to guard ourselves individually. In Philippians 4 we read: “Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness”—or your moderation— “be known of all men. The Lord is near. Be careful about nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard”—or as in the Authorised Version ‘shall garrison’—“your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus”, vv 4-7. Individually we should know what a garrison is, how to guard ourselves. “Be careful about nothing” means do not be over­careful about anything, “but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving”. Prayer would be a general idea of the expression of dependence, and supplication would be a humble attitude taken regarding any specific matter that may arise in our lives. “In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard”, or garrison, “your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus”. Oh, how important it is to garrison our hearts and our thoughts. The enemy can get in by means of our hearts and our thoughts. Let us know what a garrison is, to guard our hearts and our thoughts by the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. Oh, I would like to know something of this kind of garrison.

Then there is need for garrisons in our localities, guarding what is local for the pleasure of God. We have first of all a garrison in Syria of Damascus. The first mention of the Syrian was Laban. In Genesis three times we have reference to Laban the Syrian; therefore we can see early in Laban the feature of the Syrian. The Syrians actually became enemies of God’s people throughout the books of Kings, and they are enemies of the Jews right to the present time. I understand that in the last days Ammon, Moab and Edom will come to light, but Syria is there now. It shows how persistent the Syrians are in opposition. Laban the Syrian was a man who was looking for self-promotion, selfish advantage. When the servant was responded to by Rebecca in the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis it is written of Laban, in verse 30, that he saw the ring and the bracelets on her hand. Laban the Syrian was a politician looking for self-importance and self-promotion, and that, dear brethren, let us face it, is in every one of our hearts. If anyone says, I am not like that, he does not know his own heart. It is in every one of our hearts and needs to be subjugated and garrisoned. It says, “David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus; and the Syrians became servants to David”. Oh, it searches us, dear brethren; with these Syrian propensities can we become servants to the true David? “The Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts. And Jehovah preserved David withersoever he went”. The feature of self-promotion can upset a locality. Have we not seen it? Maybe we have had part in some self-promotion, some importance; how subtle it is! The same element that seeks promotion in politics or in business can be active in the locality and spoil what is for Christ. David personally was not in Syria, but the garrison was there, and the garrison represented David in Syria, just as our Lord Jesus Christ is absent and is looking for persons in our localities who are subdued, who become serviceable to Him in His absence maintaining by self-judgment what is for the pleasure of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The other place where there was a garrison was in Edom. “He put garrisons in Edom: throughout Edom did he put garrisons”. The feature of Edom was that he forsook the brotherly covenant. Have we not seen that working in localities? Have we not seen brotherly relations breaking down, distance coming in? What havoc it has worked! These two elements; self-promotion, and the breakdown of brotherly relationships, have happened in localities. Do we not therefore need garrisons? There is the danger of falling out with our brethren when we get a distance from them. We were reading 1 Peter recently: chapter 2 begins, “Laying aside therefore all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings”. These things are elements that come to light in our relations with one another. The fact is, dear brethren, in our working with our brethren locally, we have to judge features that we would not know existed unless we were working with brethren. Anyone alone on a desert island would not have occasion to be marked by malice or evil speakings or envy. It is in our working things out together that these features arise, hence the need of the garrison. “He put garrisons in Edom; throughout Edom did he put garrisons and all they of Edom became servants to David”. How needful is the element of the garrison, maintaining a continual guarding, not just now and again, but continually. David was not there but his garrisons were there, and they represented the tastes and desires of David. In Syria and in Edom there were garrisons.

In 2 Chronicles Jehoshaphat put garrisons in what had been acquired by his father Asa. Like Asa, several kings of Judah had a very bright beginning and failed in the end. Let those of us who are older be garrisoned, no matter how the Lord may have helped previously. Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Uzziah, Hezekiah and even Josiah, were good kings, and they failed at the end of their lives. Jehoshaphat “set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim that Asa his father had taken”. That was something recovered; we need to guard what has been recovered, what has been acquired in the exercises of what we speak of as the recovery or the revival of the truth. The importance of this feature in our localities was seen in Paul in Ephesus for three years as he describes it in Acts 20. He certainly was a garrison there. He said, “for three years, night and day, I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears”, v 31. “These hands have ministered to my wants, and to those who were with me”, v 34. He had not shrunk from announcing to them all the counsel of God, see v 27. The full light of Christianity, the full light of what has been recovered in this time in which we are, has to be garrisoned. He showed to the overseers his hands and he appealed to them; he told them what could happen, and what did happen, in his absence. He said, “Wherefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears”. What an overseer Paul was! He leaves his example with the overseers in the locality. There is a great need in localities of overseers. In Paul’s day overseers were appointed; Paul chose elders in each assembly, see Acts 14: 23. He chose elders, they were selected men. They are not chosen today, they are not official, but the element of overseership is most important in our localities, to be a garrison, to represent the tastes and what suits our absent Lord down here in local settings. It involves labour—“for three years night and day, I ceased not admonishing each one of you with tears”. He speaks earlier: “I held back nothing of what is profitable, so as not to announce it to you, and to teach you publicly and in every house”, v 20.

There is a need for more household visiting. If we see one another only in the meeting it can be formal. There is a need for household visiting, not only being invited for a meal which Peter encourages—“hospitable one to another”, 1 Pet 4: 9. Paul would not wait to be invited for a meal, he would call on each house; he knew where each brother and sister lived and he would call and teach in every house. This used to be done in earlier days. In my young days there used to be more visiting in households, just calling on one another, and thus young people get to know the brothers, not only in meetings but they know them in a friendly household way and all this builds up and promotes brotherly and sisterly relations; it promotes the element of family life.

Great care was taken about Ephesus, for Ephesus represents the fulness of assembly light which has to be garrisoned. Paul spent three years there; then he called the overseers over especially to instruct them as he was going away. We need to be concerned, dear brethren, about the maintenance of the fulness of what has been recovered because the level tends to lower. The recovery began brightly with fulness of devotion to the Lord and exercise to provide what is suitable to Him. There must be such exercise represented in our localities. Paul wrote to Timothy: “Even as I begged thee to remain in Ephesus, when I was going to Macedonia, that thou mightest enjoin some not to teach other doctrines”, 1 Tim 1: 3. He was to be a garrison to protect what was so precious. We have or ought to have the full light of Ephesians and it needs to be garrisoned. Paul felt happier about Ephesus leaving Timothy there; his true child in faith was left to represent Paul, represent Christ in His absence. How important this matter of garrison is! It applies to the great subject of overseership.

Paul also sent Timothy to Corinth. He speaks of the Corinthians as “my beloved children”; he speaks of Timothy as “my beloved and faithful child”. His beloved and faithful child was sent amongst his beloved children who were not behaving well. In Corinth there was the house of Chloe, not prominent, but she felt the condition of things. There was something of a garrison there; she could inform Paul as to what the conditions were. There was also the house of Stephanas in Corinth, which Paul commends in the last chapter of 1 Corinthians. He says, “I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the saints for service,) that *ye* should also be subject to such, and to every one joined in the work and labouring. But I rejoice in the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because *they* have supplied what was lacking on your part. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: own therefore such”, 1 Cor 16: 15-18. Such persons were at Corinth, maybe they were not able to do very much because there was a strong party element there, but at least they represented something like a garrison in that locality. Paul wrote to the Colossians who, like most of us, had made some progress but were in danger, but in the locality at Colosse there was Epaphras, a local brother, who had the same desires as Paul. Paul speaks in Colossians about “what combat I have for you” (chap 2: 1), and Epaphras at the end of the epistle is commended because he prayed the same way as Paul prayed; he combated the same way as Paul combated. “Epaphras, who is one of you, the bondman of Christ Jesus, salutes you, always, combating earnestly for you in prayers, to the end that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God”, chap 4: 12. Such a man was a fine garrison in Colosse; would they not prosper with a man like that there?

May the Lord encourage us to see the need to garrison ourselves, our hearts and our thoughts, and be exercised that there might be this element of protecting what is so valuable to the Lord in our local settings. It is incumbent upon us. The Lord is not here, the Lord is absent, but there are to be persons in localities to represent what is in the Lord’s mind for us for the pleasure of God. There were garrisons in Syria and in Edom and in what was acquired by Asa, and so we need to protect and guard what there is in our localities. We have a great desire for additions, especially in localities where there are few, but there is something as important if not more important, and that is to guard what we have especially if we have numbers because some have been lost. Let our first exercise be to guard what we have, to promote what is for the Lord’s pleasure, to protect persons and maintain the level of what is for the pleasure and glory of God. At least some have to. If no persons in the locality have this feature, conditions will definitely deteriorate. But the Lord is looking to those available to garrison what is so pleasing to Him. We were speaking about the angel of the various assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3 where the Lord appeals to the responsible element. We are all responsible, but some are more responsible than others. Shepherds are more responsible than sheep. We are not all shepherds, some are sheep who have to be cared for, and the Lord expects shepherds to care for the sheep. The Lord holds shepherds and overseers responsible for conditions in localities. May the Lord encourage us and help us. Think of the privilege these garrisons had in David’s time to represent the absent David. What a privilege we have to garrison our hearts and our thoughts, and to protect what is so precious to the Lord in our local settings. May the Lord help us to take it on, for His Name’s sake.

**TORONTO**

**20th May 1989**

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# THE LORD’S INTEREST IN LOCALITIES

**Revelation 1: 4-6; 3: 22; 22: 6, 17**

**Hebrews 10: 23-25**

**Matthew 18: 20**

**Malachi 3: 16**

J.R. These scriptures give some idea of what it means to God that there should be persons in local settings and their comings together. The verses we have read in Revelation speak about the assemblies: “John to the seven assemblies which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is, and who was, and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ”. It is to the seven assemblies. The verse we read in chapter 3 is “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies”; and in chapter 22: “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies”. These are persons in local settings. All believers are the subjects of interest to the Father, to the Lord Jesus and to the Holy Spirit, but there is something special about persons who are in local settings and who gather together. We need to see the advantage such persons are to heaven, to God. We take these things for granted, but we might be encouraged to continue and to be assured of the interest of heaven in these settings and the advantage to the Father; I suppose “him who is, and who was, and who is to come”;—I suppose the Father is in mind; to the seven Spirits, which would be the Holy Spirit related to these assemblies; and to “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness”.

C.F.D. Do you think it would help us to get a greater appreciation of what the Lord has been preparing to set in each place? Paul seems to catch the spirit of this; he writes to localities—to Corinth, to Philippi. These are local assemblies. I suppose we should have great regard for what the Lord has set in any given locality.

J.R. Paul addresses the Corinthians: “to the assembly of God which is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”, 1 Cor 1: 2. The recovery which began one hundred and sixty years ago was to the economy of local assemblies, not to Pentecost with the spectacular gifts that were there. Let us appreciate not only what local meetings mean to us but the advantage that such settings are to the Father and to the Spirit and to the Lord Jesus and what They have in mind to produce.

J.A.P. That is reinforced by the Lord Jesus Himself. In Matthew 16 He says “my assembly” (v 18)—which I understand is a general thought— but in chapter 18 He refers to the locality, as to which He has given further help since He went to heaven.

J.R. That is right. “My assembly” must involve the assembly consisting of all who compose it from Pentecost to the rapture; it is still being built; but “the assembly” in chapter 18 (v 17), as you say, is the local setting. Let us be clear: we cannot say that we are the assembly. We gather together in localities, but do not let us think that we are the assembly, because the assembly in a place includes every believer in the place who has the Spirit. Assembly character is what the Lord would appreciate and what we would desire to have part in at the present time; assembly light, assembly character, assembly principles governing us.

J.A.P. That is very encouraging. Whether the numbers are few or many in a place, to hold the light of the assembly is a very great test; it is to me anyway.

J.R. Yes. What you raise is important because in Matthew 18 you have the word “tell it to the assembly”; that contemplates the early days before the public ruin, when all believers could be together. Then the Lord said, “Again I say to you, that if two of you” (v 19), that is two assembly persons, two having assembly light, governed by assembly principles, of assembly character, and that is what the Lord looks for in the day in which we are—“two of you”. Then He says “where two or three”—that is the local setting—“where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them”. Such local gatherings are for our benefit but also of benefit to the Father and the Son and the Spirit. Those who are faithful in localities provide a training ground for having part in administration in the world to come, which will be assembly administration.

G.H. When He says, “Again I say to you”, does that bring out how important it is in His mind?

J.R. Yes, the Lord graciously looking down through the centuries and having in mind conditions in which we are at the present time when the church publicly is in ruins. “Two of you” and “two or three gathered together unto my name” refer to conditions in which we are, really remnant conditions, but all the moral features of the original are to be found in remnant conditions for the pleasure of God and of advantage to Him to form what He has in mind. It is an advantage to us to have the privilege of gathering together and an advantage to divine Persons.

G.D.P. Even in the Old Testament, “Assemble the people, and I will give them water” (Num 21: 16): that was the advantage. But could you tell us a little more about assembly administration in the day to come?

J.R. What is your idea of administration in the world to come?

G.D.P. I am sure that is right but the individual must come into it when he is over ten cities.

J.R. Yes, but where did he learn administration?

G.D.P. I suppose at the present time.

J.R. Yes, and he learns it, I think, in taking responsibility locally.

G.D.P. Working together with the brethren locally.

J.R. Being an influence for good in the locality he becomes influential in the world to come. Is that right?

E.C.B. That is certainly what we have been taught. Is it not, strictly speaking, the local assembly in Jerusalem of which the Lord speaks as “me” in Acts 9? It is interesting that in Acts 8 it refers to Jerusalem and the assembly which was there, and in Acts 13 you have Antioch and the assembly which was there, showing how early the idea of assemblies in a place entered.

J.R. Exactly. Paul was used by the Lord to establish such local settings; he was specially used for that, the light from heaven and the truth of the body governing him. Also what is peculiar to Paul is the truth of the new man. The Lord said, “Why dost thou persecute me?”. What Paul saw were features of the Lord Jesus formed in persons, and that is what he hated; he hated the Lord Himself, and he hated these features in testimony which is the new man. The body is the organism and the new man is the continuation of Christ in testimony which Paul saw and hated.

E.C.B. Does that not come into 1 Corinthians 1: “according as the testimony of the Christ has been confirmed in you”, v 6?

J.R. Quite so.

W.McK. Would you say that if the Lord has set me in a place He intends me to learn administration in that place, not in some assembly where I am not local.

J.R. That is very important. Most of us have our hands full looking after ourselves, keeping ourselves right. If we are able to keep ourselves right, which is a full time job, maybe we are able to influence rightly what is in our locality.

W.McK. I would agree with that. What strikes me is that I can carry in intercession all the assemblies, but the Lord does not mean that I should be in every place administering.

J.R. Exactly. I do not think anybody today has the gift of government. I believe as the result of all the ministry we have received that government belongs to localities, and government in localities depends on the quality of the persons in the localities. I do not know whether you agree with that.

W.McK. Yes, I would agree with that fully. “The government shall be upon his shoulder”, Isa 9: 6. I think it behoves us to remember that.

J.R. There were gifts of government that Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 12, and I have no doubt there were persons with the gift of government in those whose ministries we value which extended over one hundred and twenty years, but I do not know anybody now who has. Hence the importance of the quality of persons in our localities.

J.McK. That is the principle which Paul gave to Titus in relation to Crete, to set elders in every city that they might set right what remained unordered.

J.R. Quite so. Paul established elder—“And having chosen them elders in each assembly, having prayed with fastings, they committed them to the Lord, on whom they had believed”, Acts 14: 23. Overseership and eldership in localities are very important. The Lord addresses the angel of each assembly; all are responsible, but some are more responsible than others, and the Lord would hold some more responsible than others for conditions in our localities.

K.A.O. To confirm what you are saying, Paul told the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20 what they were to do; he says “shepherd” (v 28). You might have thought that they did not need that, because that was part of their responsibility, but he exhorts them to take up that matter in responsibility.

J.R. Exactly. He showed them his hands how he had served them. He said that for three years he had been amongst them publicly and in every house admonishing each one of them with tears. Is that not the service of overseer? They are not chosen today, they desire and qualify.

K.A.O. Too, he twice mentions his tears. I feel exercised myself—I wonder how much we really do care about our local brethren.

J.R. Yes. For instance the care of the young people; the feelings of Paul came out in his tears. He says, “each one of you”.

J.McK. Spiritual and moral qualities are needed in the elders in a city, not simply the hoary head (which, if in the way of righteousness, is honoured, see Prov 16: 31), but experience with the Spirit especially and with the Lord’s authority is required in elders in every city.

J.R. Elders show by example, not only by precept. That would have its place but example is very important.

J.McK. Also teaching, teaching the right way in which we should move and the things we should do, and our dependence upon divine Persons for our leadership and for our instruction, having an opened ear, the word going down into our hearts, so that we answer morally and spiritually to our place as elders in the city.

H.G.H. It is very interesting that in Mr Darby’s day there were those who wanted him to go to a certain place to administer but he would not go for he wanted what was there to administer; he did not want to intervene himself.

J.R. That is what Paul did at Corinth, he did not go but he sent Timothy, and he desired Apollos to go. As far as I can see there is no locality in fellowship in such a poor state that we would not go there. Things were bad enough at Corinth; Paul did not go because he was an apostle, but he sent Timotheus and he wanted Apollos to go, and apparently Titus must have gone because he brought back the report. I fail to see any reason for one not going to a locality which is in fellowship.

T.E.D. Would you say that our very inquiry as to our relations with God underlies how we act in the local assembly? It is an individual matter in my own relations with God, and then as we work things out in the local assembly it is as drawing upon the headship of Christ.

J.R. Quite so. We learn much by being in localities; we learn in our localities what is in our own hearts. If we are alone in our Christian pathway we will not have the tests we have in our localities. Peter writes, “Laying aside therefore all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings”, 1 Pet 2: 1. Such things come out in company. If I were alone on a desert island I would have no reason to have malice or guile or hypocrisies; it is as we work together we find these things in our hearts; they have to be judged or else disaster will result.

T.E.D. When it comes down to just two in a locality it would be that much more exercising in working it out, but it can be worked out if there is the drawing from the headship of Christ and seeking to care in the light of the whole assembly in the place.

J.R. Exactly. The Lord comes down to “two of you”, two assembly-minded persons, two persons with an assembly outlook; and then “two or three”. Is it not gracious of the Lord that He should foresee conditions such as we are in now? I question if the great leaders whose ministry we value in the recovery foresaw the smallness of the conditions in which we find ourselves. But is not the Lord able? He says “where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them”. As we have been taught, it is not a promise, it is a consequence. As a consequence of two or three being gathered together unto His name He will be there, and if He is there I want to be there. We need to value our local gatherings.

E.C.B. Is not what you said earlier the whole substance of what is known as the Ryde division, when there were exercises there and a brother took it on himself to think the state of things there was weak and went down and intervened in local matters. Mr Darby says, There was an assembly there that was to be recognised. A brother took upon himself to intervene in that situation and division arose; there was sorrow enough already but the history of it remains. I think the history of Bethesda is better known than the history of the Ryde division and it is the latter division which bears on some current exercises.

J.R. That is right. The reason of it was a low state among the brethren.

E.C.B. Among the brethren generally, not just in one place.

J.R. Exactly. It was not a matter of the truth, the truth was not at stake, it was a low state among the brethren. Maybe our state is not so good as we think it is. We need to see ourselves as the Lord sees us. The Lord writing to the seven assemblies showed what He thought of them, not what they thought themselves.

E.C.B. One speaks humbly and carefully about these things, but I wonder if I go to a place and intervene in a local matter I do not regard myself as superior to what the Lord has there, and I ought to regard what the Lord has there as always superior to me.

J.R. Exactly. Even Paul had to recognise that what he was the means of forming under the Lord in localities was greater than himself. In Acts 20 and 21 in every assembly there was a lead which he could have followed.

J.A.P. I think it has been remarked that there was more evil stated by Paul in the two epistles to Corinth than could be said of almost any assembly in the recovery; that is not to legalise evil, as we know, but yet he called them the assembly of God which is in Corinth. The concern I have in moving around a little, as I know you have, is to strengthen what is right; feed the brethren.

J.R. That is very important.

C.F.D. Which can be done without projecting myself into the rights of that locality. There are certain things that belong there and I do not have to intrude into that. I can remember, as you can, a situation in the eastern part of this country, in which a brother intruded into the rights of the place; he was giving direction as to what should be done, and the brother of whom we thought so much at the time rebuked that, he would not accept it. I think we ought to remember these things and carry them forward with us and be affected accordingly.

J.R. I think one of the things that the Spirit is saying to the assemblies is, Leave local matters where they belong. I think He has said that for a long time, but it is a question whether we have ears to hear what He is saying.

E.F.C. Mr Taylor gave a wonderful example in 1937 in his approach to the situation in Newcastle. We can read the letters surrounding that incident. He went there and gave a word in a powerful way and left the matter with the local brethren to work out.

J.R. If there is concern there is plenty of room for prayer and, too, for positive ministry if occasion arises, but not going to a locality because they are not doing what I think they should do is not right. I do not know all the facts but those who are local do.

S.E.H. Would you say a word as to how the matter of overseers and ministers would work out. You mentioned the gift of government not being present amongst us, but both of those features are in 1 Timothy 3. Would you say something as to overseers and how that works out in contrast to, or along with, ministers.

J.R. Ministers are deacons, and sisters can be deacons, sisters are included in ministers in 1 Timothy 3. Overseers would be concerned about the spiritual welfare of the saints. Ministers would be brothers and sisters who care more for the practical needs of the saints. That is the way I understand it. Both these features are needed in our localities, but they are unofficial; they are not officially appointed, but the work has to be done. There has to be desire to have part in these very important services in the locality.

S.E.H. That is helpful. It speaks of one aspiring to exercise oversight, then the qualifications, and then the thought of taking care of the assembly of God. That seems to be an advance on the man in the gospel who took him to the inn and said, “Take care of him”, Luke 10: 35. Should that not be the exercise in any service toward the saints, taking care of them, taking care of the assembly of God?

J.R. The blessed Spirit is the great Innkeeper, but then persons locally have to take on that service. It says in Acts 20, “wherein the Holy Spirit has set you as overseers”, v 28. So the innkeeper idea ought to be seen locally, the Spirit using persons.

J.T.G. In verse 5 of Revelation 1, is it the motives and the energy to carry things through rightly? “To him who loves us” is a current matter, and then “has washed us” and “made us”. We are in the making now. Some of us have constantly to be adjusted but we are here to get help.

J.R. We are here to get help, that is right. Preparedness to be adjusted is a very fine feature. We may have ideas and thoughts and think we are right, but we need to be prepared to be adjusted by the Lord to come into line with His mind; that would make for unity. Lack of unity is largely caused by the lack of preparedness to be adjusted. If we are all prepared to be adjusted according to the Lord we would all be of one mind.

T.E.D. We sang at the beginning of the meeting,

We sit as learners at Thy feet

(Hymn 216).

Mary chose that part. Is it not that element in a locality that leads to the needed correction and help coming in? So in John 12 there is service and the house is filled and each is in his and her place in accord with the way we should be in our local assemblies.

M.G.W. Tell us about this touch in chapter 22. After all the judgments He says, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you in the assemblies”. Is this His intense interest in us down here?

J.R. Yes. Why did He say “to you in the assemblies”? Why does the Lord say, “He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies”? It shows divine interest in local settings. He could have said, I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things to you, but He says, “to you in the assemblies”. It is an advantage to the Lord Jesus that we should be in local settings, advantage to us too, and of intense interest to the Lord.

E.C.B. In regard to what you were saying earlier about external influence brought to bear on places, I suppose it would be right for us to say at the same time that no locality would exclude the godly advice or help from elsewhere, but the person bringing in godly advice would be equally godly in leaving the matter to the locality.

J.R. Exactly. Godly exercise would be priestly exercise, considering for God, considering for persons.

E.C.B. I think that. But while we emphasise, and rightly—and I venture to say we cannot emphasise too much at the present time—that localities have the authority from the Lord to deal with their own matters, it would not be right to exclude godly counsel from others, but those who are capable of giving godly counsel will recognise that the authority resides in the place.

J.R. Very good. I am sure that is very important. Also if any action taken by a locality causes concern, that locality should have regard to the concern because a locality acts on behalf of all. Administration is local but local administration is action on behalf of all who are in fellowship. So if there is concern the matter should become a concern in the locality where the action has taken place.

E.C.B. That is right. But it needs also to be borne in mind that it is only those in the place who know the whole of the matter. It is just factually true that anyone outside receives reports of what is inside from a particular source, whoever it is—right, wrong or intermediate—but the only persons who know everything are local.

J.R. That is right. After all the fuss and all the anxiety and all the exercise and all the feeling, what has been done has to be accepted anyway.

E.C.B. It is perhaps that we do not trust the locality to deal with its own matters, and we do not then trust the Lord that, if they made a mistake, He will see that it is put right. We need confidence in one another, confidence in assemblies and above all confidence in Christ.

J.R. That is very important.

L.McF. So in Acts 9 we get Ananias and the adjustment needed in relation to Saul: that is what we should be ready for.

J.R. That is very good. I was impressed recently with that chapter. The Lord said to Saul of Tarsus, “Enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do”, v 6. The Lord knew when He said that that Ananias would have difficulty; He was the one He was going to send, but He had confidence that Ananias would accept the adjustment. In Acts 10 the angel sent by the Spirit told Cornelius to go to Joppa to fetch Simon, who is surnamed Peter. The Spirit knew well that Peter would have difficulties but He had confidence that Peter would accept the adjustment. I hope the Lord has confidence in every one of us here that we are prepared to accept adjustment.

L.B. So to Ananias it is no longer Saul the persecutor but “brother”. He becomes a brother, which is very important.

J.R. “Saul, brother”: that is fine. Ananias fully accepted the adjustment. He had no wrong motive, he thought he was protecting the saints because he had heard what kind of man Saul was. There was no ulterior motive but he had to be adjusted.

J.A.P. In Joshua, chapter 22, after a long period of silence, Phinehas comes to light. When the brethren were ready to go to war with Reuben and Gad over a matter, Phinehas went down to them and ascertained the facts, and he came back and really said, It is not exactly what the brethren thought. Thus unity was preserved. There was a man, it seems to me, held in reserve since the book of Numbers when he dealt with a serious matter. Newcastle has been referred to: there are elders amongst us who have seen things earlier who can help the brethren now in what you are saying.

J.R. What you say is true. We had that chapter in the local reading at Toronto. The people heard what the two and a half tribes had done and “the whole assembly of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh, to go up against them to war”, v 12. They faced them with wickedness before they inquired; they inquired afterwards. Before they inquired you find a whole section from verse 13 to verse 20. Just like ourselves—we hear something and we put the worst construction on it before we inquire. That is what they did, even Phinehas was in that. When they inquired and had the matter explained to them they were quite satisfied, in fact it says the thing was good in the sight of the children of Israel.

J.A.P. Phinehas finally says, “This day we perceive that Jehovah is among us” (v 31)—no need for the war.

J.R. That is right. But why did they gather themselves to go to war before they inquired? They spoke about wickedness, they compare the action with what happened at Baal Peor and Achan; they made all these accusations and then when they heard the explanation they were quite satisfied; it was good in their sight. It is good to make full inquiry first.

H.J.G. One thing we always need to bear in mind is the feature of lowliness. Paul said “I indeed myself thought that I ought to do much against the name of Jesus the Nazaræan”, Acts 26: 9. That really worked out in the local assemblies.

J.R. It did. He said in Acts 20, I was among you in all lowliness, see v 19. That is a very fine feature—lowliness, humility—and we have every reason to keep lowly and humble; not to be presumptuous but to be marked by lowliness. “Keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace” (Eph 4: 3); what precedes that is “all lowliness”.

L.McF. Is that not part of the discipline we go through in the local assembly which is intended to keep us small?

J.R. Exactly. We are obviously in remnant conditions. Think of the numbers we had in this area, in our country, on the Continent, in Australia and New Zealand, South Africa: we are in remnant conditions. That is a humbling situation, but let all the moral features of the original be found in these conditions, not the public glory of it, but the moral features of it.

J.N.C. Lowliness is safe, it keeps the brethren safe. “Put thyself down in the last place”, Luke 14: 10.

J.R. The Lord was invited to that Pharisee’s house; where do you think we would have found Him? We would have found Him sitting in the lowest place. He observed how they all wanted the first place. “Put thyself down in the last place”.

E.C.B. While administration is important, it is not the most important thing.

J.R. No, it is not. The persons who administer are far more important than administration. What is in your mind?

E.C.B. I sometimes wonder whether we get so occupied with administration because we are occupied so little with the more positive aspects of what Christianity is in practice. It is no doubt true that we learn administration here in view of the world to come—all these things we are familiar with—but we want to be a bit more in the world to come than administrators. We shall want to be enjoying Christ for ever; that is the thing to be promoted now.

J.R. Eternal life is what we ought to enjoy, especially in our gatherings together. How administration is carried out would be an expression of the quality of the persons who are in the locality. The verse we read in Hebrews was, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom is with some”. We can get into the custom of not regarding the privilege of our assembling together on the level on which God Himself values and appreciates these occasions. Entering the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus is the new and living way involving our individual links with God, which would encourage us to find ourselves in our own company, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom is with some”.

K.A.O. Is there some suggestion that this word “but encouraging one another” is connected with our assembling? I wondered if there is a link in some way with the verse we read in Revelation 3: “what the Spirit says to the assemblies”. In a local company is where we get encouragement from one another.

J.R. That is right. ‘One another’ is a fine expression; it says, “let us consider one another for provoking to love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together”.

H.G.H. Is this word “by so much the more as ye see the day drawing near” especially for us?

J.R. Exactly.

S.E.H. Is that the day of the Lord’s appearing or the rapture?

J.R. I regard the Lord’s coming as one thing in two parts. The rapture is the rapturing of believers from Abel (who was possibly the first to die) right on to when the Lord comes. Immediately a change takes place when the rapture takes place, and it is followed by the appearing.

S.E.H. That is helpful. Does “the day” therefore encompass both thoughts? We are looking for both matters.

J.R. Yes. The rapture, I understand, has been referred to as the hope of the church. From the time when the Lord left His own until the present time it has sustained in hope the personnel of the assembly right through the centuries. The hope of the church is the rapture, and the appearing follows after. This dispensation in which we are has been said to be the longest there has ever been. Why should that be? The Father who has the allocation of time allocates one thousand years to the public vindication of the Lord Jesus. He allocates two thousand years to the formation of the assembly. It is because of the greatness of the capacity of the vessel, the assembly. You get some idea in Revelation - twelve thousand stadia, cubed, see chap 21: 16. I have tried to reckon the cubic miles; I think it is three thousand three hundred and seventy five million cubic miles by the measurements given, showing the capacity of the vessel that is being formed. It takes two thousand years, allocated for the purpose. There is something special about the time we are in now; there was the time of Pentecost, the time of Paul’s ministry, then the ruin; there was the revival one hundred and sixty years ago, and our time, the time of the completion of this vast vessel. How tremendous the capacity of the holy city.

J.McK. I wonder if you see the filling out of what is said in Malachi as the pouring out of blessing (see chap 3: 10)—the saints in that day looking on to what we have now, and the wonderful privileges that we enjoy together. What could be greater than the giving of Christ and the Holy Spirit and giving us one another to walk together with!

J.R. Exactly. Inasmuch as we are reduced in number we need to appreciate one another more, just as these persons in Malachi. It is a very fine verse; it says, “Then”—that is the time when there was indifference as to the rights of God, the name of Jehovah neglected, His service neglected—“Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another”, often. That is a remnant condition, not many, “one to another”. It says “Jehovah observed it”, that is sight, “and heard”, He listened to what they were saying, “and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared Jehovah, and that thought upon his name”.

W.McK. They were to be unto Him a peculiar treasure. I think we ought to regard the saints in that light. We sometimes regard them as mediocre in doing things and saying things, but what they are as a treasure to Jehovah means the highest quality that God can secure for Himself.

J.R. Yes, a peculiar treasure. The Lord has something very precious to Him in localities; let us have the same value of such persons.

T.E.D. The fact that He hears and He sees makes our responsibility the more.

J.R. Exactly, He observes; “Jehovah observed it, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him”; somebody, I suppose, wrote that book of remembrance “for them that feared Jehovah”, that is, pious persons in localities down here, “and that thought upon his name”. The Lord does not make great demands upon us; I lay upon you no other burden, the Lord says to a certain assembly (see Rev 2: 24), just like those that feared Jehovah, and thought upon His name. Can we get into that category in remnant conditions in localities?

T.E.D. Those repeated words in Revelation, “I know thy works”: the Lord knows and hence our responsibility to maintain things in accord with His will and pleasure.

J.R. I am sure you are right. It is a question of maintaining things. The warfare in Ephesians 6 is defensive. In the book of the Acts we have as many chapters dealing with Paul in prison as we do with Paul in active service. Why should that be? Paul in chapters 13 to 20 is moving out, the Lord using him to establish local assemblies; from chapter 21 to 28 he is a prisoner and he is on the defensive. More than once he speaks in his defence. That is our position, defending in humbling circumstances. It is like the conditions in which we are.

G.H. I was going to ask you about the verse which says “Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another”. It says about Cornelius, “fearing God with all his house” (Acts 10: 2) and in Ecclesiastes, “Let us hear the end of the whole matter: Fear God” chap 12: 13. Did you say that fearing Jehovah was piety?

J.R. I am going by Hebrews 5: 7: “and having been heard because of his piety”, and the note says, ‘Or ‘fear,’ as some translate; and then well rendered, as in A.V., ‘in that he feared’.’ Piety is the same idea. Fearing God is not being afraid of Him but being under His authority and considering for Him.

G.H. One of the malefactors said, “Dost thou too not fear God ...?” Luke 23: 40. Did piety enter into that?

J.R. Exactly. There is a great need for piety at the present moment. One of the features that marks the apostasy is ungodliness. You find in Jude the words ungodly and ungodliness quite a number of times and that is what marks the general situation, ungodliness. “Piety with contentment is great gain”, 1 Tim 6: 6. You have proved that?

G.H . It does promote contentment.

E.C.B. The verses you read in Hebrews 10 are an echo of what is in Malachi 3, are they not? Would you not think they were holding fast in Malachi—holding fast the confession without wavering, considering one another for provoking to love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together? The day to which they are looking in Malachi is a day of judgment but the day to which they are looking in Hebrews is a day of blessing.

J.R. Quite so. Also in Malachi 2 you have Levi, “My covenant with him was of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear; and he feared me, and trembled before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth”, vv 5, 6. Where do you find that today? You find it in Malachi 3: “they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another; and Jehovah observed it, and heard”. Do you think so?

E.C.B. Yes. It is interesting that in Malachi it is as if it is an individual; in the history it was a tribe, but it is written as if it is an individual, and now it must be in individuals.

J.R. Exactly. This remnant goes right through many years to the beginning of Luke’s gospel. It speaks there about all these things that were the subject of conversation in the hill­country of Judæa, see chap 1: 65. It is this idea continued, and we are in these days now. It is a test: what is the subject of our conversation; but when we come together there is one subject of conversation. We can sustain for a whole hour, in a reading for instance, a conversation about the truth; it is a great privilege.

G.D.P. If we were more occupied with the positive side of things these other things would fall into their proper place.

J.McK. You can never exhaust that subject of conversation.

J.R. That is quite true. A brother who came amongst us recently told us that what impressed him most was the readings, the mutual conversation. Readings are testing unless there is subjection to the Lord, liberty for the Spirit and love for one another.

E.F.C. So should we not be concerned that as many as possible in the place be together, that we may not forsake the assembling of ourselves together? I wonder if the enemy is not out to try to bring in that little wedge at the present time. I mean there is so much in this modern age to engage the time of the brethren, particularly the younger brethren, in education and otherwise, and should we not just all set ourselves to be at as many meetings as possible?

J.R. That is right. A brother with us, now with the Lord, certainly came to every meeting and was very diligent in exhorting all who could possibly be at the meetings. Of course there are legitimate matters that have to be done, children to look after and such things, but we need to get the right view of what we have been considering, the local setting and local gatherings and what they mean to heaven, the advantage they are to God in completing His work; the gatherings have a great part in that.

K.A.O. Would you include even meetings like this in this matter of not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together? I do not think in any sense we want to neglect the local meetings—that is very important, probably our first responsibility—but we have many opportunities to be at meetings; I feel exercised that we should use the opportunities we have.

J.R. That is right, not neglecting the local position. There are a good number here; it is good to see interest in the truth. How much more precious it is to the Lord to see persons who are interested in the truth. It gives Him a great advantage.

R.J. Did not Thomas miss something by not being there?

J.R. He did.

N.B. What the Lord said to Peter, “Lovest thou me?” is like “why dost thou persecute me?”. It is the extension of “me” in a sense.

J.R. Peter had quite an idea of his love for the Lord and maybe some of us would have that too, but John did not have that outlook, he regarded himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. John would say, I cannot say very much about my love for the Lord but I can say much about His love for me, and of course that produces responsive love. Our love for the Lord Jesus is response to His love for us. The more we are conscious of the love of Jesus for us the more we will love Him in response, because initiative in love belongs to the Lord Jesus.

N.B. Before the Lord actually comes and this formation period is completed would you think there might be an express word by the Spirit, the Spirit speaking expressly in the ministry meeting or whenever?

J.R. What we have in our meetings for ministry ought to be what the Spirit is saying to the assemblies.

J.McK. The Spirit would speak as the saints are assembled on every occasion; He is bringing out a certain exhortation in view of the saints being stimulated for the Lord’s coming, so that the Spirit and the bride say, Come.

J.R. That is right. The question is, Have I an ear to hear, am I listening, am I coming in expectancy?

E.C.B. You were speaking about Peter in John 21 and love; is not what he says in his epistle very attractively humble, “whom, having not seen, ye love”, 1 Pet 1: 8? That is, persons who have never seen Jesus and yet they loved Him and he who claimed so much has to be adjusted.

J.R. Exactly. He comes in John 21 to “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I am attached to thee”. That means, Thou canst observe something, there is something that can be taken account of.

E.C.B. He admired the others who had never seen Him.

J.McK. I have seen paintings of Peter failing, walking on the water and beginning to sink, but I have never seen one where an artist showed the Lord’s hands stretching out and causing Peter to walk with Him into the boat. We ought to have that in our minds instead of Peter’s failures. Let us see the triumph in trusting the Lord for myself and for the brethren, that I am going to be safe with His hand of support.

J.R. That is it.

E.C.B. It has been pointed out that Peter could not have walked on the water even if it was smooth.

J.R. He walked on the water supported by the Priest. It is like finding our way in the present public confusion, to experience the grace of the Lord Jesus and His priesthood to support us.

**PLAINFIELD**

**29th May 1989**

**Key to initials** –

*At the end of the following reading*

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# INTEREST IN THE THINGS OF GOD

**Genesis 25: 27-34**

**Exodus 3: 1-5**

**Psalms 132: 1-5**

**Zechariah 2: 1 -5**

J.R. We have been considering heaven’s interest in what is proceeding down here, and we could be challenged as to what interest we have. These scriptures might give us some indication of how we can commit ourselves to interest in the things of God, beginning when we are young—the earlier we begin the better, to be really involved and interested. Jacob was interested and valued the birthright. Birthright relates to inheritance; Jacob valued the inheritance that came through Abraham and Isaac and came to the next generation, to Jacob. Esau despised the birthright, Jacob valued it. There is a great need for our young people and all of us to value the birthright. We have in Joshua 17 (vv 3, 4) the inheritance which the daughters of Zelophehad valued; and Naboth valued the inheritance of his fathers, and would not give it up for the best business proposition he could be offered, see 1 Kings 21: 3. We ought to value the inheritance of our fathers, what has come down to us in the recovery of the truth.

It says here, “And the boys grew”. The parents had their exercises—Isaac waited twenty years for the family and the record also shows that Rebecca went through secret inward exercises before the boys were born, and then the boys grew. Boys grow and girls grow; what kind of features are going to be manifested? Is there going to be interest in the birthright or are we going to despise the birthright? What a solemn thing if such a birthright as we have come into is despised! Jacob valued the inheritance of his fathers.

G.D.P. We often refer to the boy Samuel; he grew.

J.R. The boy Samuel grew, and he grew on.

J.A.P. What is the birthright in Christianity?

J.R. For us it would be the truth of the assembly, as we sang in our opening hymn (No 221)—the light of God’s purpose. It would be initially what was established by the apostles and what Paul brought out, the truth of the mystery and the assembly; it would involve all that, and it would involve for us what has been recovered in the truth. It is an inheritance which we ought to value.

J.A.P. That is good, sonship and eternal life, and so on. But you have something in mind about the time of recovery.

J.R. These things were in some measure lost sight of during dark ages but have been recovered, and we have the ministries available which set these things out. What an inheritance our young people have and we all have! We need to become interested. There is nothing for those who are not interested. We begin by interest as Jacob did. Esau was a man of the field, no doubt a popular kind of man, a man who would make friends outside which is a great snare; he despised the birthright. Jacob was a homely man, dwelling in tents. It says that Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob (see Heb 11: 9); it does not say he dwelt in tents with Isaac and Esau. Jacob became interested and then he valued what was available to him.

C.F.D. Do you think that is a key? You spoke about the older brethren being an example to the younger brethren. If the young people look on and I am not interested in the inheritance, and Christianity is but an appendage to my life, that is not going to be of any help or any strength to them. Do you think the older ones—we ourselves—have to set the thing on and show them by example that we value the inheritance?

J.R. That is very important. Isaac is viewed typically as the heavenly man. Heavenly things would be involved in his life and they ought to be involved in our lives. As you say, example is very important for our young people. If parents of young people are not really interested or committed there is no example for young people. But Isaac and Rebecca were.

S.E.H. Would it be right to think of Abraham imparting to Jacob what God had told him in the early part of his life? God said “Go out of thy land, and from thy kindred”; and then the blessing that God promised him “I will make of thee a great nation”, Gen 12: 1, 2. Would that enter into Jacob’s appreciation of the birthright?

J.R. It would indeed; he would see it in Abraham and in Isaac. I think Jacob was about sixteen when Abraham died, so he had those sixteen years with Abraham and of course, longer with his father Isaac, and Jacob must have become interested. So the boys grew; what kind of features are going to come to light? That is a testing matter for young people—of course for all of us, but young people particularly.

L.B. Would determination and desire help on this line? I was thinking too of the appeal in Revelation: “Hold fast what thou hast that no one take thy crown”, chap 3: 11. Would that link with what you had in mind?

J.R. Exactly. “Hold fast what thou hast” would in principle be the inheritance that we have come into.

T.S.O. Jacob is spoken of as the one who is loved. I was wondering if that would provide the basis for what transpires in him. There was an environment which would allow the expression of what is found here in the way of response and commitment.

J.R. Jehovah loved Jacob. The Lord loves this feature of interest. He said that in Malachi “I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau”, chap 1: 3. When they had proved the kind of persons they were. He loves this feature which began with Jacob although he had many ups and downs. If we commit ourselves when young we will have our ups and downs but we will learn God in the process as Jacob did.

T.S.O. Is the truth of that scripture that he was loved as a consequence of what he did rather than before it took place?

J.R. That is how it is worded in Malachi. Jehovah loved this feature with Jacob from the very beginning. Moses records in Genesis Jacob’s desire and interest in the birthright. What you say is true, that God loved this feature in Jacob.

E.C.B. Abraham according to chapter 24 was immensely rich—sheep and cattle, silver and gold, bondmen and bondwomen, camels and asses —and it came to Isaac intact. Now the question is, is it going on intact?

J.R. That depends on ourselves; what we have been recovered to is to be exemplified in those of us who are older. Isaac was sixty when the boys were born. The boys grew; what is going to come to light? What a challenge that is! I trust every young person here will take this to heart, to show interest. That is to be encouraged.

L.McF. Abraham was characteristically a heavenly man; his manner of life was in relation to heavenly things. Is that not the test of the moment?

J.R. Such were strangers and sojourners. They were strangers not only because they did not belong here but because they belonged elsewhere.

G.D.P. Jacob seemed to be under the influence of his mother. We should be under the influence of Jerusalem above, which is our mother, which is the assembly, see Gal 4: 26.

J.R. That is right. Mothers are to represent that as well as fathers.

T.E.D. Paul draws Timothy’s attention to “the unfeigned faith … which dwelt first in thy grandmother Loïs, and in thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also” 2 Tim 1: 5. There is the need with us all for the revival and the strengthening of these links of faith.

J.R. There certainly is.

M.G.W. Is there something cumulative about the way that Esau came to despise this? He went to the field and that made him faint then he says, I am going to die, what use is the inheritance? Something that might start rather innocently in a simple way may lead to this.

J.R. What you say is very true, and I have noticed that what is a great attraction is companionships outside the fellowship.

G.H. The Lord when He probed Peter said, “Art thou attached to me?” Peter said, “Thou knowest that I am attached to thee” John 21: 17. I know that I have been attracted to the Lord but I certainly would like to get hold of being attached to the Person.

J.R. Attachment to the Lord Jesus is basic, and then to value the light we have been brought into, the greatness of the inheritance, the light of the epistle to the Ephesians and all it contains, the truth of the mystery, the truth of the assembly; all these matters are to be valued by us. The blessing was the result of valuing the birthright. The birthright and the blessing go together. They were both blessed—Esau was blessed too—but there was something special about Jacob’s blessing because he valued the birthright.

G.H. I would like to get hold of this matter of being attached to the Person. I certainly have been attracted to the Person, I certainly have a measure of affection for Him, but I would like to be truly attached to the Person.

J.R. If I am truly attached to the Person I will be interested in all that He is interested in. In the Song of Songs the enquiry is, “Tell me, thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest thy flock”, chap 1: 7. Attachment to the Person whom the soul loves causes the enquiry, Where dost Thou feed Thy flock, where dost Thou make them to rest at noon, where are Thine interests preserved and valued? If we are attached to the Lord Jesus in reality we will be interested in His interests, in what He is doing.

J.N.C. Would it help also that we look into the inheritance that has been so wonderfully given to us and acquire experience with God in understanding and appreciating those who have gone before in the testimony, specially those who might have been near to us and have helped us particularly in our souls?

J.R. That is the truth. The inheritance and the value of it has been exemplified in those who have gone before. Some of us have parents who have exemplified this very feature. It is a very solemn thing to despise that birthright. What a man Esau became, he hated his brother. There is a remnant I suppose, from nearly every nation except Edom—a very solemn thing. There is from Egypt, Moab and Ammon but not Edom. It is a very solemn thing to despise the birthright.

K.A.O. You referred to the scripture in Hebrews, that Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob. Maybe we should be exercised as parents not to be settling down here and that our houses are not places for enjoyment only of what is down here.

J.R. Some of our young people, when they get married, are criticised for trying to begin where there parents left off, but they have learned that from their parents; that is the standard they have understood and therefore they want to make it their standard. I do not blame them too much. Maybe we are responsible for not remaining in a tent, in simple circumstances.

K.A.O. Jacob learned from Abraham his interests were in relation to heavenly things, not in relation to this earth. Stephen says that God did not give him even what he could put his foot on, see Acts 7: 5. There was nothing here for Abraham.

J.R. What a man he was! He went out not knowing where he was going; all he knew was the God who called him. That simplicity of faith came down and Jacob valued it. He was like ourselves, he was not the same as Abraham, he had ups and downs, but God valued that initial interest and his value of the inheritance and he came into it and represented it and passed it on to his twelve sons. He was a great father, he had twelve sons all in fellowship. What a wonderful father he was! Even Abraham had only one, Isaac had only one in fellowship, but Jacob had twelve all continuing the tribes in the testimony in spite of all his ups and downs. He learned God in them all. God can turn our failures into means of knowing Him.

H.J.G. The Lord spoke about every one forcing his way into the kingdom, see Luke 16: 16. I was wondering if that had any connection with this matter of the birthright. Is that not following up the line of new birth?

J.R. I am sure that is true. The secret is that Jacob was born anew, and therefore he had these desires and interests. From our point of view we are challenged when we are growing up, what kind of features are we showing?

K.A.K. Is there not a need for developing a taste for these things? I was thinking of Caleb and Joshua observing the land and having a totally different interest in it from what the others had.

J.R. That is right, they tasted it. Our tastes need to change. As we are interested in the things of the Lord and committed in attachment to the Lord Jesus and valuing the inheritance, our tastes change, our values change.

K.A.K. That same taste must have come down to Achsah because of what she asked, and then asked Othniel to ask also. It is interesting how that is communicated from one generation to another.

J.R. That is very fine. She urged her husband in what was right. She did not hinder her husband, which is a word for young wives and older ones too, to urge their husbands into what is for God’s pleasure.

S.E.H. Is the solemnity of God’s judgment of Esau seen in the prophet Obadiah? It says, “the house of Esau for stubble; and they shall kindle in time and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for Jehovah hath spoken it”, v 18. How solemn!

J.R. The consequences of despising the birthright, the inheritance, are very solemn. We ought to go on to the next scripture, Moses’ interest in the bush; he saw the thorn­bush burning and it was not being consumed. It says, “And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire”, that is, the flame of fire indicated God’s presence; the presence of God is represented by the Angel; “out of the midst of a thorn-bush”. The thorn-bush would represent the conditions in which God is prepared to be with His people, not attractive naturally, not a great cedar, but a thorn­bush, of no consequence in the eyes of men but God was there, the fire was there, but the thorn-bush was not being consumed. It is like the presence of God among His people, which may be seen in localities. Localities continue, maybe not very attractive to us when we are young, but God is there. The fire consumed what was consumable, but there was a work of God there, there was what was pleasing to God. The thorn-bush burning but not being consumed is a very fine illustration of God being with His people. The flame of fire was Jehovah’s presence, the thorn-bush represented the conditions where He was pleased to be. What grace to continue with His people! As in the wilderness, in all the murmuring, all the difficulties, God was there. He says in Malachi, “I Jehovah change not, and ye, sons of Jacob, are not consumed”, chap 3: 6.

R.J. Is that demonstrated in the three men in Daniel in the fiery furnace? It was what was in them that was unconsumable which was carried through with the presence of God.

J.R. Quite so.

L.McF. “And Moses said, Let me now turn aside and see this great sight”.

J.R. This great sight, a thorn-bush burning but was not being consumed. We need to see our localities in this light. “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12: 29); it is a process. Jehovah saw that he turned aside. The Lord takes notice of one who is interested in a local setting, unattractive to men naturally, but there is something very precious there.

L.McF. That is fine. So that the Lord’s chief interest should be our chief interest?

J.R. That is very good.

G.D.P. Nehemiah went to Jerusalem when it was in ruins, but he was interested in that locality.

J.R. Exactly. The feature of Nehemiah is leadership; he told no one what God had put in his heart. He began with himself; afterwards he told others. Then there came a difficulty and he said, “I consulted with myself”, Neh 5: 7. That is a very important feature. He did not ask someone else’s opinion; “I consulted with myself”. There was the wherewithal in himself to consult. We need more of that kind of thing. This thorn-bush is very interesting; God was there.

C.F.D. What you are directing us to is extremely interesting, God was there. The locality in Corinth was like a thorn-bush, very unattractive; they had all kinds of problems, really disregarding the principles that were set out. You might say, What was there for God? But God was there, “the assembly of God which is in Corinth”, 1 Cor 1: 2.

J.R. God was well able to bring them all through, as He will with all His people.

C.F.D. Paul was interested in principle. I know he did not go, he sent Timothy, but in principle he turned aside to see what God was going to bring out of the place.

J.R. That is very fine. He went later; he spent three months in that area according to Acts 2 (v 3) after they were recovered. He would build them up. The fire was active in Corinth and these awkward, difficult, wrong elements were no doubt judged.

C.F.D. The fire was having its effect. So when he wrote to them the second epistle the effect of the ministry was there and they were judging themselves; God was having His way. That was the effect of the fire.

J.R. The fire would be, in principle, in the first epistle.

T.E.D. I was wondering if the thorn-bush is not suggestive in some way of God’s history with us in our local settings. Is there not a lot to think back over in our localities as to the way God has brought us through. It would be very difficult for me to leave a local setting where the history of God’s ways has been with me. I think some of our brethren who are moving from one place to another ought to weigh over carefully in the divine presence what they do.

J.R. I think that is true. Yet you are sympathetic with young men who have employment and value employment. It is quite difficult in Britain, for instance; some may have to move somewhere else if the firm moves them; they have to weigh all these things up. “I consulted with myself” would enter into it, the weighing up where the Lord would have me. We are not saying that such must not move. You are not saying that either.

T.E.D. No; I am saying weigh it in the divine presence, because it will either be for good, or for sorrow if the Lord is not fully in it. But if the Lord is in it blessing will result and increase.

J.R. It is good to be interested in the Lord’s dealings with us in localities.

E.C.B. The Lord uses this section to bring out that He is the God of the living. I wondered if that was the birthright today. He is not the God of the dead; you might say He was the God of Mr Darby and others, but He is the God of the living. Is God Himself our birthright?

J.R. Very good. Jehovah Himself was the Levites’ inheritance.

K.A.O. I wanted to ask if Ruth and Naomi would be a parallel thought? Ruth appreciated Naomi when there was nothing outwardly attractive about her. Naomi said, “the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me”, Ruth 1: 20.

J.R. I am sure that is the same kind of thing. Naomi was the result of God’s discipline, which enters into our localities too, but she became attractive to Ruth. She was a widow with no prospects; she presents that to Orpah who turned back, but Ruth clave to her. What a committal she made! “Do not intreat me to leave thee, to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go”, Ruth 1: 16. That could be a committal to the local position.

K.A.O. Thy God my God, thy people my people.

J.A.P. Naboth lost his life because he valued the inheritance of his fathers.

G.H. You mentioned Nehemiah consulting with himself. The prodigal in his misery consulted with himself.

J.R. He came to himself.

G.H. Maybe you have something more for us about consulting with myself.

J.R. There was something in Nehemiah he could consult, some knowledge of God. It says of David in Ziklag, when things looked so black, so difficult, “David strengthened himself in Jehovah his God”, 1 Sam 30: 6. It would be that idea, getting back to our personal knowledge of God.

H.J.G. Does this show the beginning of Moses’ learning time? The call came from God and he answers, “Here am I”.

J.R. Quite so. Moses learned something here. He had to care for, I suppose, about two million people for forty years; no doubt the impression of the flame of fire in the thorn­bush sustained him. He would say, God is here. In spite of all the difficulties, all the sorrows, all the burdens he carried, he continued forty years with two million people. None of us have as many as that to care for. The Lord gives us a few to care for. He says, I am going to live with these people eternally, I have given them into your care for a short time.

J.T.G. When he is writing in Deuteronomy 33 he said, “the good will of him that dwelt in the bush”, v 16. He does not speak of the fire or of the thorns; it is the good will, which would be what we begin with God’s pleasure in us—would it not?

J.R. Very good. He speaks in that section about the law as the inheritance of Jehovah; “Moses commanded us a law, The inheritance of the congregation of Jacob”, v 4. That is what Moses valued, that is what the people needed to value and which we need to value.

E.C.B. The reference to Deuteronomy 33 is interesting because that is the end of the history; what Moses says amounts to saying that whatever has happened on the way the good will of God has been in it all. “All things work together for good to those who love God”, Rom 8: 28.

J.R. There is the Numbers account of the years in the wilderness and there is also the Deuteronomy account: “all the way which Jehovah thy God led thee ... to humble thee, and to prove thee ... and fed thee with the manna”, Deut 8: 2,3.

J.McK. The tribes were settled in the land and the cities by lot; it is by measure. We take account of things according to God’s measure. It says in Ezekiel that the name of the city from that day was “Jehovah is there”, chap 48: 35. We want to get to the moral and spiritual value of these things; we seek perhaps in our minds to measure them and forget that God’s measure has already been established for us to understand.

J.R. Quite so. In Psalm 132 we have David’s exercise and interest; what he is concerned about is better conditions for God. What a concern it ought to be with every one of us locally—better conditions for God! You wonder at the language he uses; “vowed unto the Mighty One of Jacob: I will not come into the tent of my house, I will not go up to the couch of my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for Jehovah, habitations for the Mighty One of Jacob”. We do well to be concerned about better conditions in our localities. There is no locality where conditions cannot be improved. What results is that what David was concerned about coincided with Jehovah’s own thoughts, because Jehovah said, in verse 14, “This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it”. Conditions congenial to the Lord, better conditions, ought to be our concern.

J.McK. I pointed out to a person who said, We have the same ministry as you, we have the same Lord, that the ark of the covenant was put in one place, in Jerusalem. It was not cut in two so as to have one part in one city and the other part in the other city; the ark is one and it remains one; it is for you to find out where the ark is, be in touch with the Spirit of God and He will lead you to where it is.

J.R. I am sure it is a fact that, where there is genuine enquiry, genuine seeking, the Lord will answer such.

R.J. Colossians has two references to Epaphras and the last reference is that he prayed earnestly to the end that the saints might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, see chap 4: 12. Is that the thought you have in mind?

J.R. Exactly. He was local in Colosse and he had the same prayers, the same concern for the Colossians, as Paul had. Paul combated the same kind of combat in prayer for his local brethren.

J.A.P. David is recalling a committal made when he was younger. Would that be right, do you think?

J.R. Yes; he said, “Behold, we heard of it at Ephratah”; somebody must have been speaking about it and he had an ear, an interest in what was being said when he was young. “We heard of it at Ephratah, we found it ...”; he heard of it first and he was interested and valued the light that came to him and then he found it by experience.

E.F.C. Would you say that Solomon, in 2 Chronicles 6, quotes almost the very words of David here in his prayer and praise? I wondered if he gathered that from his father, showing how the testimony is carried on and these precious things handed down from one generation to another.

J.R. That is very practical; things should be handed down unimpaired from one generation to another. That very thing was committed to Timothy: “the things thou hast heard of me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, such as shall be competent to instruct others also”, 2 Tim 2: 2. It comes to us as “others also” and is meant to promote faithful men so that things are passed on as others also become faithful men. Is that not the line on which the testimony is continued, not by creed but in persons?

M.G.W. Would it appear that the individual has company? “I will not come”, “I will not give”, “until I find”; then “Behold, we heard of it” and “Let us go”, and the prayer that he prayed: “Let thy priests be clothed”. God answered it in the same Psalm.

J.R. Exactly. David says, “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness,” and the answer is “I will clothe her priests with salvation”. David prays, “let thy saints shout for joy”, the answer is, “her saints shall shout aloud for joy”. There is a full answer to this desire for better conditions for God in our localities, better conditions for the service of God.

M.G.W. “I will abundantly bless her provision”.

E.C.B. According to the end of 1 Chronicles David, having this desire, used his affliction and his affection and his strength to bring it about. Even if things were bad he used them—what I have prepared in my affliction, see 1 Chron 22: 14. He is still working towards this in which his interest had been acquired early.

J.R. When he somewhat departed from it, Urijah represented the same thing.

E.F.C. In the end of 1 Chronicles it speaks of the “times that passed over him”, chap 29: 30.

M.G.W. Did you think that Urijah might have reminded David of his earlier committal? The language is very much alike.

J.R. Exactly. He said, the ark first. What a faithful man he was! David was prominent, Urijah was not, but he was there in the background with the same interests, the same desires.

C.F.D. In the ways of God he was clothed with peculiar dignity as he is mentioned in the genealogy of Christ.

L.B. David’s desire was that there should be a united company going forward. He says here, “Let us go into his habitations, let us worship at his footstool”. What a great desire that is, that each one of us should carry the other into these great things.

J.R. That is very good. He set the thing out himself and then he said, “Let us”, being an example himself. It would be good if every one of us took up this exercise about the conditions in our localities for God, for the service of God, for the testimony.

Zechariah is very interesting and what impressed me is “the angel that talked with me”. Over ten times in the first six chapters of Zechariah we have reference to “the angel that talked with me”. Zechariah was interested and he had the service of the angel that talked with him. He asked about ten questions and the angel that talked with him is able to answer all the questions. There is something very sweet and very fine about heaven’s interest, heaven’s availability, to persons who are really interested. Now the question would be what for us would answer to the angel that talked with him. In fact, there are two angels in the verse we read: “And behold, the angel that talked with me went forth; and another angel went forth to meet him, and said unto him, Run, speak to this young man” (who, I suppose, was Zechariah himself) “saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein”. If we really commit ourselves in interest valuing the things of God we will find abundant help. There is the help of the Holy Spirit. There was intimacy between Zechariah and that angel but we have One more intimate still who abides with us and in us available to help us. Were you thinking of the Spirit?

T.E.D. Yes, I was thinking of the Spirit. It is wonderful how near divine Persons are to us, the Lord is above but the Spirit is here.

J.R. Exactly. When the Lord was here every question the disciples asked would be answered by Him. Then the Lord says, I am going to leave you but you will be even better off without Me and with the Spirit because He will be with you and in you. The question is, Do we make full use of the availability of the Holy Spirit?

A.S.H. Do you think there was urgency when he said, “Run”? The king’s business requires haste.

J.R. Very good. It shows heaven’s availability to help us, to help persons who are interested. Then the Spirit would use persons to help us to answer our questions, our difficulties. The angel that talked with me would extend no doubt to persons who are available, enlightened persons who are available to help us. We need to keep inquiring. The temple involves that spirit of inquiry. We provide temple conditions as to how we come together in complete dependence and expectancy and inquiry. We provide temple conditions and the Spirit comes into that and answers exercises.

S.E.MacC. We spoke a little earlier about consulting with ourselves; I wonder if the Spirit would help us in this.

J.R. Surely, because consulting with myself, as Nehemiah said, would involve for us having the Spirit in and with us.

S.E.MacC. He would help us in our decisions.

E.F.C. Does that involve relating ourselves to the inward man? We sometimes forget that there is a work of God in us that is imperishable and is going through irrespective of our outward failures and mistakes.

J.R. That is very good, because the inward man appears in Romans 7 in contrast to the flesh. “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man” (v 22) and the inward man is in correspondence with Christ Himself. The Lord said prophetically, “To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight” (Ps 40: 8), and the inward man has the same delight.

E.F.C. The inward man would be in perfect concert with the will of God, would never lead us astray.

J.A.P. Consulting with oneself in the sense that you use it is not independency. Paul said to Barnabas in Acts 15: 36, “Let us return now and visit”, and Barnabas was minded to take Mark but Paul thought differently. I am bringing that in so that we are not advocating independency. There is not one of us who does not need advice sometimes and I am sure there are many who would give it to us too!

J.R. Quite so. “The angel that talked with me” involves being prepared to be adjusted and maybe directed; heaven’s interest may be expressed through persons. What you say about Barnabas and Paul is interesting; it says, “and Barnabas taking Mark sailed away to Cyprus”—sailed away—“but Paul having chosen Silas went forth”, Acts 15: 39, 40. Barnabas and Mark sailed away. We do not want to sail away, we want to go forth.

G.D.P. Actually Esau represented the flesh and Jacob was the spiritual side.

G.H. It says about the prodigal, “And coming to himself”, Luke 15: 17. He was consulting with himself.

J.R. Yes. No doubt the work of God was there and expressed itself in repentance; he came to himself.

J.A.P. We are not always governed by providences but the providence of God may come in and confirm something to us. Should we look for that? I have things to decide in my life and I am glad of the prayers of the brethren, and we would look for something from heaven to show us or confirm us in what is in mind; and maybe we take counsel too.

J.R. Surely. As you say, we are not to be independent, but it is good to have something within you, some knowledge of God within that we can consult with.

H.G.H. If we do that, consult with ourself, we get the help of the Holy Spirit, and then if we confer with our brother and he is spiritual there will not be a difference.

J.R. That is so, there will be confirmation like the angel that talked with me.

R.J. Is it related to the unction—“know all things” 1 John 2: 20?

J.R. Yes, very good. We are thus independent of human learning and teaching.

J.N.C. Would that be borne out in verse 10 of the next chapter, Acts 16? No doubt Paul was affected by the vision which he saw; it does not say that he consulted with himself but he brought the brethren into it. Luke says, “And when he had seen the vision, immediately we” (that would be Luke and Paul and Silas) “sought to go forth”. There is the going forth again, the level was maintained.

J.R. That is fine. See how sensitive they are to the Holy Spirit. It does not say exactly that the Holy Spirit led them, He forbad: “having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia”, and then “the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them”, Acts 16: 6, 7. There must have been a very sensitive character with this company.

J.N.C. Yes, we are always thankful for this because our being in the testimony depends on it; how one man and several others with him were sensitive to the Spirit.

J.R. That is right. As you say, the vision appeared and then we concluded, and it was a right conclusion they came to in this sensitive area of seeking guidance. It is difficult sometimes to get the Lord’s mind; we have to be delivered from all personal preference and personal prejudice to get what the Lord’s mind is in this sensitive area of moving.

G.H. “The Spirit of Jesus did not allow them”: there is something very gentle and tender about that.

J.R. That is right. There is the Holy Spirit and then the Spirit of Jesus.

H.G.H. If it is difficult to get the mind of the Lord is it that self-will is at work?

J.R. Self-pleasing too there may be, in some way. I have been impressed with what the Lord said to His disciples in Luke 22: “When I sent you”—when I sent you, mark you—“without purse and scrip and sandals, did ye lack anything? And they said, Nothing”, v 35. It is a great matter to have some consciousness of being sent, and if one is sent, the wherewithal will be supplied. “When I sent you”. Our movements ought to have some sense of being sent. “Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased”, Dan 12: 4. That is not a very good setting, but “when I sent you” ye lacked nothing.

L.B. Would that link with the Lord saying, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God”, Matt 6: 33? It does not stop there; what is encouraging is “and all these things shall be added unto you”.

J.R. That is right. So “when I sent you” would involve this sensitive area of divine direction. If we are going to do anything to help, this is most important: “when I sent you ... did ye lack anything? “They lacked nothing because He sent them. If we presume to go without this sensitive matter of being sent we might lack something; we may not get on so well.

J.A.P. A brother locally said to the brethren, I have an exercise to preach on the street, and in the providential ways of God he obtained a permit from the government; but the permit came from above, and then the brethren went with that. That is the idea, that things are initiated in one person, as you are outlining, but you are looking for confirmation. The Spirit of God in type in Genesis 24: 21 remained silent to see whether Jehovah had prospered His journey. If a divine Person in type, speaking reverently, says that, that is something for us to learn.

J.R. The first thing the servant did when he arrived at that place was “he made the camels kneel down” (v 11)—a very fine expression of complete dependence. We do not want of course to get into legality but it is a great matter to be sensitive as to what the Lord would have us do. If you get an invitation to a three-day occasion you accept that, but we do not want to be freelances moving about. It is not a question of having the wherewithal financially; it is having the wherewithal from the Lord as being sent.

J.McK. Jehovah said, “Whom shall I send ... ? ... Here am I; send me”, Isa 6: 8.

J.R. That is a good attitude on the part of any one of us, to be available to be sent, and then if we are, possibly we will know we are sent.

E.C.B. Can we not judge whether a brother or brothers or sisters are sent?

J.R. How can we judge—results?

E.C.B. Partly by results, but we have the Spirit and there is one Spirit and God is not a God of disorder.

J.R. That is right.

S.E.H. Were the brethren able to tell in Acts 15? “But Paul having chosen Silas went forth, committed by the brethren to the grace of God”, v 40. It just impresses me that that is in a way a very simple test. These words “sailed away” versus “went forth” test our motives.

J.R. The brethren did not send them but they approved of their going forth, they laid their hands on them confirming the sensitive exercises they went through.

W.McK. It is interesting that they speak of them not in any distinctive way as gift or anything like that but “men who have given up their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”, Acts 15: 26.

J.R. That is character. This matter of the angel that talked with me shows heaven’s interest and availability in persons who become interested and ask questions and get the answers to their exercises.

**PLAINFIELD**

**29th May 1989**

**Key to initials** –

N.Beckwith, Los Angeles; L.Bernard, Ormond Beach; E.C.Burr, London; E.F.Cary, Los Angeles; J.N.Castle, San Francisco; C.F.Dadd, Plainfield; T.E.Druckenmiller, Plainfield; H.J.Glass, Toronto; J.T.Greenhalgh, Preston; G.Hesterman, Plainfield; S.E.Hesterman, Plainfield; A.S.Hinkson, New York; H.G.Holt, Chicago; R.Johnston, Woodstock, Ont; K.A.Knauss, Indianapolis; S.E.MacCready, Cape May; L.McFarlane New York; J.McKillop, Chicago; W.McKillop, Ormond Beach; K.A.Oberg, Villa Grove; T.S.Oberg, Villa Grove; J.A.Petersen, Plainfield; G.D.Pfingst, Plainfield; J.Renton, Edinburgh; M.G.Wood, Dundee

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# KEEP THYSELF PURE

**Hebrews 9: 13, 14**

**2 Timothy 2: 22**

**2 Peter 3: 1**

**1 Timothy 5: 21-25**

It is in mind to speak about purity. We go through the world where there is plenty to contaminate, even in the religious world: one of the great needs at the present moment is purity.

I would like to illustrate these scriptures which I have read from women in the New Testament. The first speaks about a pure conscience, which we see in the woman in John 4. The wherewithal for a pure conscience is presented in the scripture read in Hebrews 9, “how much rather shall the blood of the Christ, who by the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God, purify your conscience from dead works to worship the living God?” The righteous basis has been laid by which we can have a pure conscience, which is a very important thing for every believer. In John 4, which is one of the most beautiful incidents in the New Testament, we see how the Lord Jesus in His conversation with that woman presents first of all the attractiveness of what is in God’s mind in the gift of living water. He gains her confidence, and her interest in such a blessing as living water, and then He raised matters which affected her conscience. Things that were not on her conscience He raises with her, not to get her depressed or unduly occupied with her history, but to clear her history and to set her up with a pure conscience. He goes into her history as, dear brethren, He would go into every one of our histories. “Go, call thy husband, and come here.” (John 4: 16) raises the whole matter. What had not been previously on that woman’s conscience, the Lord put on her conscience to clear her conscience.

We arrive at and maintain a good conscience by self-judgment, and let us understand what self-judgment is. It is not the judgment of self to satisfy self; it is judgment of self to God’s satisfaction. The woman arrived at a pure conscience to God’s satisfaction. She said “Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done”. She did not say, Come see a man to whom I told all things I had ever done. That would have been to her satisfaction, but she said “Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done”. She knew that everything was cleared, everything was out, because He had undertaken it. Self-judgment is not judgment of self to satisfy self. Self-judgment is judgment to God’s satisfaction. The woman saw herself as the Lord saw her. Self-judgment involved that we see ourselves as God sees us.

That is how we arrive at a pure conscience and how we maintain a pure conscience: “purify your conscience from dead works to worship the living God?”. Did not that matter of the worship of God come into the conversation with the woman? “The Father seeks such as his worshippers”. Who would such be? They would at least be persons who had a pure conscience, who saw themselves as God saw them with everything cleared to God’s satisfaction. How that is needed at the present moment! I believe that all the difficulties that arise and continue among us are due to the lack of self-judgment, having judgment of ourselves to God’s satisfaction. It is elementary, but it is most important to have and maintain. Hebrews 4 indicates the process of this judgment: “For the word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” It is a very inward process. “And there is not a creature unapparent before him”. The word of God brings us to Him; “but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we have to do, Heb 2: 12, 13. We have to see ourselves as God sees us.

It has often been said, and it is very true, that the most difficult person for me to judge is myself. I have known men who had a pretty good judgment of everybody else except themselves. It is easier to judge others than to judge self. We tend to be easy on self. The woman said “Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done” she had come under the scrutiny of the Lord and everything was clear to His satisfaction. May this be true of everyone of us.

If we had and maintained this pure conscience what a wonderful company we would be. Such persons would be in unity, would see eye to eye, have the same judgment as God has. May it become attractive to everyone of us! It becomes attractive as seen in that woman. She went out in testimony to the very men whom she would likely know and who would likely know her. Her testimony was effective for they came to know the Lord for themselves. They believed not only because of her word, but because they had come to the Lord themselves. True testimony would result from persons who have this pure conscience.

Now there is a pure heart, and that relates to the affections. In 2 Timothy it says “with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart”. Paul writes to the Corinthians and addresses them as those who call on the name of the Lord, but in times of public ruin, such as we are in and which 2 Timothy visualises, Paul adds “out of a pure heart.” I believe we see the pure heart in the woman in Luke 7. Jesus was invited to the Pharisee’s house and no doubt felt the cold atmosphere, but she brought the warmth of affection that the Lord appreciated. He did not find it in the Pharisee. He does not find it in mere profession, He finds responsive affection in pure hearts. She was a woman in the city, publicly known as a sinner, but she gave herself in response to the Lord Jesus. She washed His feet with tears, wiped them with the hairs of her head. It was herself fully committed with a pure heart in response to the Lord Jesus. She was one who loved much; she had a pure heart. Think of that house, the coldness, the indifference of it; so it is with mere profession today. How the Lord Jesus values persons who have a pure heart!—“pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart”. May we all be concerned, dear brethren, to have this simple reality of purity of affection for our Lord Jesus Christ.

How important is attachment to the Lord Jesus with a pure heart as that woman was. The Lord said to her, “Thy faith has saved thee, go in peace”, Luke 7: 50. She is not named. Her name could have been Faith or Peace but whatever her name was—the Lord said of her, “Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace”. The Lord said also, “Her many sins are forgiven; for she loved much”. How He values a pure heart! The bridegroom says “my love, my dove, mine undefiled”, Song of Songs 5: 2. You can see it in principle in that woman, not long on the Christian way, but in reality with a pure heart. May we continue in simplicity, dear brethren, with purity of affection for the Lord Jesus Christ!

In 2 Peter we have a pure mind. In his first epistle Peter speaks about the pure mental milk of the word; “as newborn babes desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word”, 1 Pet 2: 2. That, dear brethren, is to feed our minds. Our minds need food. If our minds do not feed on pure food our minds will be contaminated. Our minds are always occupied with something. I suppose the most important faculty a believer has is his mind. What kind of food do we provide for our minds? In the world around us there is abundance of food for the mind, but we need to be delivered from all such food and value the pure mental milk of the word. We need to feed on pure food to maintain a pure mind. The pure mind is illustrated in Mary of Bethany; “Mary ... having sat down at the feet of Jesus was listening to his word”, Luke 10: 39. She was feeding on pure food which would build up and maintain a pure mind. Our minds, I emphasise, need food. We are always thinking of something, the mind never inactive when we are awake. The responsibility is in each one of us as to what kind of food we provide for our minds. There is an abundance of pure food in the scriptures which would build up and maintain a pure mind. When we think of all the contamination in the world around us, how valuable is pure food! The ministry that we value is pure food.

I am not so sure about literature that is sometimes attractive to our young people. It may be more readable than the ministries that we value, but I can commend to everyone here the pure food of the ministries that the Lord has been pleased to give us in abundance in the recovery of the truth. Our brother referred to about 200 volumes. Is that not sufficient for us? Do we want any else? The mind needs food, and there is enough in the scriptures and ministry which has been accredited and the ministry which the Lord is giving currently. Mary of Bethany as a result of feeding on pure food became affectionate, but also intelligent. The Lord said, “Suffer her to have kept this for the day of my preparation for burial”. The Lord had taught His disciples about the Son of man suffering, going into death and rising again but they were not sufficiently interested. They understood not the saying; they did not follow it up; they were not interested in the suffering side; but Mary of Bethany is accredited with having understood what the Lord was saying in that time. We ought to be in the current mind of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will not come about without feeding our minds with pure food which is available in abundance for every one of us. May we be concerned, dear brethren, to have a pure mind! Think of what it means for the Lord Jesus to have persons here who have a pure mind to whom He can communicate what His mind is at any given moment. We read in 1 Corinthians 2: 16 “But we have the mind of Christ.” By means of having the Holy Spirit we have the wherewithal—I hesitate to say it—to think as the Lord Jesus Himself thinks. What capacity we have in the spirit of our minds!

In 1 Timothy—a very interesting scripture—we have “Keep thyself pure”. We say this sometimes to young people and, of course, it applies to young people. How important it is to keep themselves pure, to keep their bodies pure! I am not minimising the importance of this word to young people, but the context would indicate it is not only for young people. The writer says, “I testify before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels”—how solemn he is in his testimony—“that thou keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing by favour”. This keeping thyself pure is being without prejudice. Young people can have prejudice, but so can older ones. Prejudice and preference are two matters to which we are all susceptible: “keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing by favour.” These two matters of prejudice and preference are often what hinders us in knowing what the mind of the Lord is. Then he says, “Lay hands quickly on no man, nor partake in others’ sins.” Then verse 23 is obviously a parenthesis; “Keep thyself pure. Drink no longer only water, but use a little wine on account of thy stomach and thy frequent illnesses.” Verse 24 obviously links with verse 22; “Lay hands quickly on no man, nor partake in others’ sins”, verse 24; “Of some men the sins are manifest beforehand, going before to judgment, and some also they follow after.” In between, there comes, verse 23; “Keep thyself pure.” I believe the emphasis is, keep thyself from wrong influence. This applies not only to young people, but applies to elderly ones too. “Lay hands quickly on no man”; do not commit yourself too quickly. Keep thyself from wrong influence. We are all susceptible to wrong influence. This was written to Timothy and he is mentioned in this epistle as having youth—“Let no one despise thy youth”—for he would be younger than some of his contemporaries, but he was to have moral power and authority.

There were at least seven kings of Judah who were good kings, helped of God, some in a remarkable way, but they failed when they were old. This is a word, therefore, for those of us who are older. Beginning with Solomon, what a bright start he had! What a wonderful king he was! He had wisdom, given of God. What happened to him when he was older? He took 700 wives. That was not very wise, was it? They influenced him; they turned his heart at the end of his life. We need to keep ourselves pure when we are old. “Keep thyself pure. Drink no longer only water, but use a little wine on account of thy stomach and thy frequent illnesses.” If we get weak in body, old and feeble, we are more liable to be wrongly influenced. It seems to me that this verse 23 comes in in that context. Then Asa, a good king who was greatly helped, was characterised by dependence on God, but at the end of his life he ceased to depend on God, but depended on the king of Syria for help. Jehoshaphat was a commendable man in many ways, but he made alliance with the ungodly. Joash, another good king, began as a young man and while Jehoiada the priest was alive—when under right influence—he was commendable and helped of God. Jehoiada died and Joash began to be wrongly influenced by princes. Uzziah was marvellously helped, but later he presumed to take up matters for which he was not qualified and became a leper. Hezekiah began a wonderful recovery in his time and was a pious king, but later he succumbed to the flattery of the men of Babylon. Josiah was a great man who set on a great passover; there was no such passover since the time of Samuel. Think of the help Josiah received from God. Then what happened to him? He tried to interfere in a matter that was not his responsibility. Dear elder brethren, Keep thyself pure. Brothers and sisters, Keep thyself pure. It is a word for all of us.

We are rightly concerned about our young people. I am a little more concerned about elderly ones who know the truth, have taught us and instead of uniting they tend to divide the brethren. That is a greater concern. We may have been greatly helped when we were younger—I am addressing older ones, and I am one of them—but let us continue in humility and dependence, and keep ourselves pure. Nehemiah consulted with himself. David strengthened himself in Jehovah his God, the God he knew. Nehemiah had intimacy with God, he often appealed to God. He is in touch with God. In consulting with himself he would be acquiring the mind of God. I have no doubt Mary of Magdala in John 20 was keeping herself pure. She had one object to the exclusion of all else.

Dear brethren that is all I have to say. I say to young people and to older ones, keep thyself pure for the Lord’s own sake. Amen.

**PLAINFIELD**

**29th May 1989**

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# THE PRESENCE OF GOD

**Job 42: 1-6**

**Psalm 73: 13-17**

**Hebrews 4: 12–16; 10: 19-25**

I wish to speak of the presence of God, because it is in the presence of God that we find our true measure. We may pass muster among men, and among our brethren, but our real true measure is found in the presence of God. These scriptures will give us some idea of the results of being in the presence of God. Because of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ there is access for the believer into the immediate presence of God. We need to make use of that access, and to become accustomed to be before God, to be in His presence. Being consciously in the presence of God will have some results with us, which these scriptures show.

Job had much to say, but the effect of being in God’s presence was that he repented. He goes on chapter after chapter; he is able to answer all his friends, and many of the things they say are right, but Job was thinking of himself, as we all do naturally. He said, “I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear”—like us all; we have all heard of God, “but now mine eye seeth thee”. That means he is conscious of being in God’s presence. The result is, he has a thorough judgment of himself. Only as in the presence of God do we have a thorough judgment of ourselves. Job had a judgment of all his friends, and all his friends had a judgment of him; but he did not have a judgment of himself. It is easier to judge others, and maybe judge rightly, but more difficult to have a judgment of ourselves. It is possible as we are conscious of being in the presence of God, as Job said, “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”. That was his true measure in the presence of God. He said, “I know that thou canst do everything, and that thou canst be hindered in no thought of thine”. He goes on to say, “therefore have I uttered what I did not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not”. This was the result of all the questions that God asked Job in the preceding chapters. Elihu speaks and, following Elihu’s word, God speaks. We read in Hebrews 4, “the word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword”. The word of God is what exposes, exposes us to ourselves, for the most difficult person to judge is self. The word of God was living and operative as expressed by Elihu; it silenced Job. Then God came in. The word of God leads to God. “The word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit, both of joints and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”. Then it says, “And there is not a creature unapparent before him; but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we have to do”. The word of God leads us, if it is rightly apprehended, into the presence of God; that was Job’s experience.

The word of God in Hebrews supposes an honest and good heart. The word of God has to go beyond our heads into our hearts. The Lord spoke in the parable of the sower of four kinds of ground; only the last kind of ground yielded fruit. According to Luke’s account, Luke 8, the Lord said, “The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8: 11), and the seed only develops in the good ground, and the good ground, the Lord says, is the “honest and good heart”, v 15. We need honest and good hearts to be affected by the word of God. The word of God is living and operative. The seed is living and operative as it falls into good ground. If it falls by the wayside, the birds of the heaven devour it; if it falls amidst thorns, other things choke it; if it falls on stony ground there is no depth of earth, no depth, the result is merely superficial. We can be superficial when the word of God comes, but the good ground is opened up, there has been the work of God, and soul exercise, and the seed falls in and produces fruit to perfection, the Lord says, The good ground is the honest and good heart. So, “The word of God is living and operative, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and penetrating to the division of soul and spirit”. It is an inward operation, “both of joints and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”. The good ground applies not only in the preaching of the gospel, but it applies to what kind of soil we have when any prophetic word of God comes to us, whether it is resultful or whether it is not. Only on the good ground will the seed produce fruit, because the word is allowed its scope inwardly to “the division of soul and spirit”, and “thoughts and intents”; it is the inward working of the word of God.

Job experienced that “all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we have to do”. Being in the presence of God will help us to judge ourselves. What an important thing it is! We need to repent initially, but to be maintained as repenting sinners. There are repenting sinners and unrepenting sinners. May we be repenting sinners; not only to be those who repented some years ago, or some months ago, but continuing in this repenting attitude. Job said, “I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee”. He is face to face with God. There is nothing more important for the believer than to be maintained in a self-judged attitude. With such persons Satan gets no advantage; if we are not self-judged he will get an advantage, and exploit it to the full. But, “now mine eye seeth thee: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes”. Self-judgment is necessary to be maintained in communion. To be maintained in communion we need continually to judge ourselves in the presence of God. He will, if we allow Him, expose to us all that is working inwardly.

In Psalm 73 the psalmist goes into the presence of God to understand. This psalmist, Asaph, had part in the singing in the service of God and he wonders, ‘Is it worthwhile being exercised? Is it worthwhile continuing in self-judgment? Is it worthwhile washing my hands and purifying my heart? People around seem quite happy, seem to prosper’. Do you ever think that way? Do you ever get unhappy or disappointed because there are exercises among the brethren, or problems or difficulties; do you wonder if it is worthwhile continuing? That is what the psalmist says here, in principle, ‘Is it worthwhile going on with this exercise, all this labour, to keep in separation and purity of heart?’ He questions it, “Until I went into the sanctuaries of God”. In the presence of God he can see it is well worthwhile, because he understood; “Until I went into the sanctuaries of God; then understood I their end”—“then understood I”. O for understanding at the present time! Where do I get understanding? I get it from the Scriptures; reading ministry; I get it in the presence of God. “Until I went into the sanctuaries”—to see things as God sees them. The psalmist in the sanctuary, in the presence of God, saw things as God saw them, from God’s point of view.

In small circumstances, in limited conditions, is it worthwhile continuing, so much responsibility falling upon us? If we get into the presence of God we will get God’s view. God’s appreciation of persons who desire to keep themselves in purity, keep themselves in exercise, keep themselves for the pleasure of God, even in small and difficult circumstances. Things are difficult at the present time. There is public confusion, fragmentary conditions, few in some localities; is it worthwhile going on? If we are in the presence of God we will get God’s view of things. Think of God looking down and seeing a few in a locality seeking to preserve in the place what is suitable to Him. What a value it has in God’s sight! Where do they get that view? They get it in the presence of God—“Until I went into the sanctuaries of God; then understood I”; he understood. There is no more question of whether or not it is worthwhile going through exercises and difficulties; he has all the confirmation and understanding he needs whatever the situation may be.

In Hebrews 4 there is the throne of grace, “Let us approach therefore with boldness to the throne of grace”. It is wonderful to think that in a day like this there is the throne of grace. Some of us are reading Revelation; out of the throne will come lightnings and thunders, and judgment follows, Rev 4: 5. These things are going to come from the throne very soon, when the assembly’s sojourn here is completed and the Lord takes the saints to be with Him. In the meantime it is the throne of grace. God’s present attitude is grace, and help is available from the throne of grace. The throne suggests something firmly established; nothing will overthrow the throne of grace—“Let us approach therefore with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace for seasonable help”. Some seasons are more difficult than others. We have seasons of real difficulty sometimes. What is our resort? Our resort is to the throne of grace, the presence of God, where God’s grace and God’s mercy are available. It may please God to answer our prayers in mercy and extricate us; or it may please God to sustain us in the circumstances. It says, “Let us approach therefore with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy”. Mercy would extricate us, would deliver us, but then, “and find grace for seasonable help”; grace would sustain us in the circumstances. Whether it is mercy or grace needed, it is available at the throne of grace.

Then there is the priest, “a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God … For we have not a high priest not able to sympathise with our infirmities, but tempted in all things in like manner, sin apart”. The throne of grace means that we approach God; it is God whom we approach at the throne of grace, but there is there the Priest with all His sympathy, His intercession; He ever lives to intercede. We might say there is a divine system established that nothing can shake, available to us at any moment, no matter what season it is, “for seasonable help”. We need help in some seasons more than in others; the throne of grace is always available. What a resort that is, what an encouragement for us; the throne of grace is established and nothing can shake it. The throne of grace and of divine favour is established and available; mercy and grace, whatever is needed at any moment, are available in the presence of God.

In chapter 10 we have, “boldness for entering”, and this is into the presence of God, to contemplate. Job was in the presence of God to judge himself; Asaph in Psalm 73 was in the presence of God to understand. The throne of grace is for seasonable help in all the circumstances through which we pass, and in chapter 10 we have entering into the presence of God to contemplate, to be restful. In the holy of holies in the book of Exodus there was only one article of furniture, and that was the ark. In the holiest, who is there? Christ is there; Christ as Man. What a privilege it is to get apart from all that is around! It is available to individuals, just to sit quietly to contemplate, contemplate Jesus as a Man, to come to an appreciation of Him in measure as God appreciates Him. The Lord requests at the end of John 17, “that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them”, John 17: 26. How is that arrived at? One way is by going into the holiest and contemplating Jesus. What a blessed contemplation is the One who occupies the heart of God; the One on whom God could open the heavens and say, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight”, Matt 17: 5. He is now in the presence of God, highly exalted, and He is the One who is available for our contemplation.

So it says, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness”. The boldness comes from the teaching earlier in the chapter regarding the sanctified. It says, “by which will”, that is, God’s will, “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10: 10); then, in verse 12, “But he, having offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down in perpetuity at the right hand of God”, “For by one offering he has perfected in perpetuity the sanctified”, v 14. The understanding and appreciation of this will give us boldness to go into the holy of holies to contemplate. How we would grow in our knowledge of God, and in our appreciation of the Lord Jesus, by spending more time in this contemplation! It says, “the new and living way which he has dedicated for us through the veil”; that is, the Lord as Man has gone in, “through the veil, that is, his flesh”; that was His death for the removal of any hindrance, “and having a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, sprinkled as to our hearts from a wicked conscience, and washed as to our body with pure water”. No doubt “sprinkled as to our hearts from a wicked conscience, and washed as to our body with pure water” is a reference to the consecration of the priests in Leviticus 8, in other words, the sanctified.

All this gives boldness to persons who are real, who have been in the presence of God and judged themselves, who have understanding according to Psalm 73, and who have received seasonable help, who can be restful. What a wonderful privilege we have, dear brethren, to enter the holiest just to contemplate the Man Christ Jesus, and grow in affection for Him, in appreciation of Him, in measure to appreciate the Lord Jesus as the Father Himself appreciates Him, to love Him as the Father loves Him! How much is growth needed in our souls in this direction! This is how it comes about. Then the result is, “Let us hold fast the confession of the hope unwavering, for he is faithful who has promised”, and, “let us consider one another for provoking to love and good works”. This is not provoking to get the worst out of one another; it is provoking to get the best, “provoking to love and good works”. Then he says, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together”. This shows how entering the holiest is individual, because it goes on to speak about “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together”. Persons who frequent the holiest, who grow in this appreciation of our Lord Jesus Christ, come together. What wonderful times they would have! They provoke each other to love and good works; then they assemble together. Let us consider one another; there is plenty of room in our localities for considering one another. We do consider ourselves, but the effect of taking advantage of our privilege and frequenting the holiest would be in considering one another for provoking to love and good works, and encouraging one another. It comes down to small numbers, comes down to two, “one another”. Let us encourage one another on this basis; if we are more than two there is so much the more need for this, to provoke one another to good works; to consider one another and encourage one another.

May the Lord encourage us to see the great value of the presence of God—which is available to every one of us at any time. We value the meetings we are able to have, but let this be basic to all our activities; being consciously more and more in the presence of God, for His own glory.

**SYDNEY**

**8th October 1989**

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# SATISFACTION

**Psalm 36: 5–8**

I have in mind to speak about satisfaction. There is a great search for satisfaction in the world today; the lives of men, women and young people consist of a search for satisfaction, which you can never find in worldly things. Dear friend, I can tell you now, you will never arrive at satisfaction in the things of this world. Many have proved it, especially Solomon. Read the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 2 and you will find what search he had for satisfaction. He had the wherewithal to build, to make, and to have whatever he desired, and what did he say? “All was vanity and pursuit of the wind”, Eccles 2: 11. Dear friend, take Solomon’s advice, do not look in that direction for satisfaction, for I can assure you, you will never find it.

In the glad tidings God has nothing less in mind than satisfaction, as we read here, “They shall be abundantly satisfied”. That is what the gospel has in mind, abundant satisfaction, and I can tell you now, this is not just a theory, not just in the Scriptures, this has been arrived at by many people here, who can tell you what it means to be “abundantly satisfied”, to be in the experience of satisfied desire. Before we could enjoy satisfaction God had to be satisfied. There could be no satisfaction provided for men apart from God’s satisfaction. I want to tell you first of all about God’s satisfaction because the gospel contains the satisfaction that God has found.

I hope we all understand the fall of man, the working of lawlessness beginning with our first parents, the introduction of lawlessness into mankind, which has permeated every generation since. No man of Adam’s fallen race has been exempt from the result of the introduction of lawlessness by the serpent; the serpent’s bite has affected every human being since. Death is the result. It involves not only the ruin of man, but it involves an offence to God, an offence to His majesty, the dishonouring of His rights, and how God felt that! When Adam was lost, Adam did not say to God, Where art Thou? Adam did not feel it as God felt it. It was God who said, “Where art thou?”, Gen 3: 9. It was God who felt the loss. Mankind is God’s ideal; mankind was the last creation. God formed all the right conditions for man to be in and then introduced man into the best conditions, and he failed; but I want to draw your attention to the blessed Man who has provided God with satisfaction.

I would like to give you some impression of the satisfaction God had, and has, in our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been considering in these meetings the Lord Jesus saying, “I am come down from heaven”, John 6: 38. Coming into the world He said, “Sacrifice and offering thou willedst not; but thou hast prepared me a body”, Heb 10: 5. Oh think of the wondrous movement from heaven! The One whom we know as the Lord Jesus, coming down from heaven, down to this earth, treading the very earth in which we are; wonderful fact! The most wonderful movement that God ever made was in the incarnation, the Lord Jesus coming into manhood, and being a blessed Man here for the pleasure of God. Every movement Jesus made, every thought He had, every motive He had—yielded infinite satisfaction to the heart of the blessed God.

He is the great subject of the glad tidings. If God had not found satisfaction, there would be no glad tidings for humanity. God has to be satisfied first; and God has found complete satisfaction in another Man; that Man was here for God’s complete satisfaction. Think of what it meant to God to look down on a blessed Man here. After, having experienced all the sorrow of lawless man, He found a Man here in perfection, in dependence. May your heart be attracted to Him, for He is the Man in whom God found satisfaction. God desires to extend that satisfaction; it certainly was upon Jesus, but what God desires in the glad tidings is to find satisfaction in believers down here. Is that possible, that such as ourselves, born with a lawless nature, can be for God’s satisfaction? Is it possible? Dear friend, it is possible, but it needed the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. That blessed perfect Man became the Sin-bearer. The One who was so pleasing to God took the place of the one who offended, took the sinner’s place, and suffered in the sinner’s stead, suffered as if He had been the offender. Oh what a blessed work is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ!

God was satisfied in that blessed Man down here, and He has found complete satisfaction in the work that the Lord Jesus undertook and completed. He has complete satisfaction in that work. It involved the Lord Jesus being abandoned as if He had been the sinner, as if He had been the offender. Think of what it meant to the holy humanity of Jesus to be made sin; we cannot understand the fulness of what it meant to the Saviour. Is it any wonder that He recoiled at Gethsemane from what faced Him? He recoiled; His holy nature as a Man recoiled from it, yet He went forward, “not as I will, but as thou wilt”, Matt 26: 39. He went on to the cross, taking the sinner’s place, being abandoned by God, suffering the penalty of death, pouring out His precious blood, going into the grave. Oh think of the fulness of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ!

When He was here God could express His delight twice, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight!” He said that before the Lord came into service, and at the end of His service; He expressed His delight in the manhood of Jesus. He therefore was the perfect offering, for God’s satisfaction, and God has shown His satisfaction in the work accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ in raising Him from the dead, in raising Him from among the dead, a selective resurrection, selecting that blessed Man from the dead, and exalting Him, giving Him the highest place in the universe at His right hand. I want first of all to assure you that God has found satisfaction in another Man, and found His satisfaction in the work He has accomplished. God has absolute satisfaction in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is the righteous basis which has been laid for the securing of the satisfaction of persons.

Now God offers satisfaction; God’s purpose is satisfaction for men, women and young people. How is it arrived at? It is arrived at by repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Since the Lord Jesus Christ has come into manhood no other man will do for God, only attachment to that Man will deliver us from the present course of things. God would have the Man in whom He has found satisfaction to be the Man in whom we have satisfaction. The way to it is by repentance, to take one’s true place as a sinner before God, a hell-deserving sinner. We are all sinners. Paul speaks of himself as, “... sinners, of whom *I* am the first”, 1 Timothy 1: 15; not ‘I was first’, but ‘I am first’. There are forgiven sinners; I hope there are no unforgiven sinners here. If there is one unforgiven sinner, I can tell you forgiveness is available for you on the basis of repentance, because the righteous foundation has been laid, and that is immovable, for God’s eternal satisfaction; the basis has been laid. We come into forgiveness by repentance. It is very simple; repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. God is ready; He can afford to offer forgiveness to every repentant sinner, although holy and righteous as ever He was, because of His complete satisfaction in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who is a pardoning God like Thee?

Or who has grace so rich and free?

(Hymn 262)

That is God’s present attitude to every man, woman and young person. How wonderful! and it is because of the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. I remember a preacher saying some years ago that every breath a man draws, and every bite he eats, he owes to the death of Jesus, for it is only on that basis that God goes on presently with men, securing individuals. The world is not going to get better; the gospel is not going to improve the world. The gospel secures persons out of the world, individuals, for God’s pleasure. The first step towards satisfaction is that we know our sins forgiven, and that blessing is available to us, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. What a wonderful gift is the gift of the Holy Spirit! I would ask every one here. Are you a vessel of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is given to those who know their sins forgiven, and are committed to the will of God, owning Jesus as Lord. The will of God is worth committing yourself to. Persons who commit themselves receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. God does not give the Holy Spirit to persons to go their own way; He gives the gift of the Holy Spirit, One of the blessed Godhead, to be power to live here for the will of God, and to be a secret inward source of satisfaction.

The Lord Jesus said to the woman in chapter 4 of John’s gospel, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink ...”. Who it is, the One who came down from heaven, the One who laid the righteous foundation at infinite cost to Himself. May we all have appreciation of “who it is”; “If thou knewest who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him”, John 4: 10. He offers this woman living water. He offers in the glad tidings to every one of us living water. Do you have this living water? The Lord said, “whosoever drinks of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst for ever”, John 4: 14. That is a very strong negative, “never thirst for ever, but the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life”. Is not that satisfaction? Do you have satisfaction, friend? Are you satisfied? You will never find satisfaction apart from committal to the Lord Jesus and the will of God, and being a vessel of the Holy Spirit.

Note what He says, “whosoever drinks of the water”, drinks of it. That is characteristic; it is to continue, so as to experience another source of life and power, of certain satisfaction; whosoever drinks. Keep drinking of this source, this supply of divine power, of life and satisfaction. Whosoever drinks; it is not a question of drinking once and for all, it is continually drinking from a source of satisfaction. Dear friend, there are those here who could testify to a source of never-failing satisfaction in the Holy Spirit; an inward source. “Shall become in him a fountain of water”; it is life in expression in the believer, making him independent of all that the world can offer; his desires change and his taste alters.

I would like to interest everyone here in the forgiveness of sins, but also in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and I would like to encourage everyone to drink, continually to draw from this available source. “Whosoever drinks of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst for ever”. If we are not satisfied, it is because we are not drawing from this inexhaustible source, always available, indwelling the believer—wonderful thing! Paul says to the Corinthians, “Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”, 1 Corinthians 3: 16. He is thus available continually, day and night, no matter what the difficulty, no matter what the trouble, no matter what the sorrow. Jesus is to be our Object, and the Holy Spirit an inexhaustible source of joy and power and satisfaction. I would like to make attractive to you the satisfaction which can be found nowhere else. Dear friend, Are you satisfied?

This Psalm is interesting. “Jehovah, thy loving-kindness is in the heavens”. That is where Jesus is; “loving-kindness is in the heavens”, mercy, grace, all we need in our pathway here. He is there in the heavens to support us, “loving-kindness is in the heavens”; a never-failing resource we have there; by faith we are linked with Him, and by the Spirit. “Jehovah, thy loving-kindness is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds”. Oh, the extent of God’s faithfulness, and of the Lord Jesus, “if we are unfaithful, he abides faithful” (2 Tim 2: 13); “thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the high mountains”. What is presented in the glad tidings is God’s righteousness; it is like the high mountains; “thy judgments are a great deep”. Oh, Jesus proved the great deep of God’s righteous judgments and provided a righteous basis.

“How precious is thy loving-kindness, O God! So the sons of men take refuge under the shadow of thy wings”. What a fine suggestion!—“under the shadow of thy wings”. Even in difficult times, dangerous times, we can take refuge under the shadow of His wings. The outside feathers of the wings are protective, but the inside feathers are soft and warm, “under the shadow of thy wings”.

Then it says, “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou wilt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures”. This, dear friend, is no mere theory I can assure you; there are plenty here that can confirm from experience what this satisfaction is. If we are satisfied persons we have the privilege to contribute to divine pleasure, to be released in response in affection to the Lord Jesus, and to the Father, to have part in the Lord’s supper and in the service of God, and contribute to divine pleasure and satisfaction. What a privilege we have!

There are three great exercises that the believer has to face; in a sense, every day is an exercise, but there are three great exercises that the believer faces. First of all, Are my sins forgiven? Secondly, Have I received the gift of the Holy Spirit?, and thirdly, as we were having today, “Tell me, thou whom my soul loveth, Where thou feedest thy flock, Where thou makest it to rest at noon”, Song of Songs 1: 7. Where can I find where the Lord is thus active? “Why should I be as one veiled”, or roving, not settled? “They shall be abundantly satisfied”. That is down here. What is your experience? Are you abundantly satisfied, or are you roving, unsettled, not certain? “They shall be abundantly satisfied”.

May the Lord help us to find abundant satisfaction in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to find it in the company of others. The service of God takes place in the company of others. I do not remember previously having such an impression of the privilege of having part with others in the service of God, a tremendous privilege. We can remember the Lord individually, we can respond to Him individually; but how blessed to be before Him in the company of others, gathered with a purpose to serve God—“They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house”. May the Lord help us to be exercised, and help us to know what abundant satisfaction is, for His Name’s sake.

**AUCKLAND**

**15th October 1989**

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# FULFILLED RESPONSIBILITY

**Deuteronomy 26: 12-15**

This scripture supposes fulfilled responsibility. There was some conflict over this matter a good many years ago, some thinking it desirable but impossible, but there is no doubt that the scripture supposes that it is within our reach to fulfil responsibility. Having the Holy Spirit, the power for such, “the righteous requirement of the law” is fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit, Rom 8: 4. That would be fulfilled responsibility. “He that has my commandments and keeps them” (John 14: 21) would suggest fulfilled responsibility. It is a matter we ought to be concerned about both individually and maybe especially as a company, that we fulfil our responsibilities.

That is what Moses presents attractively to the people here. He puts the words in their mouth: telling them that, having fulfilled the requirement, he says, “and thou shalt say before Jehovah thy God” I have done certain things and not done certain things. They had fulfilled the commandments. The commandment, of course, is simply the expression of the will of God. The will of God covers the commandment and the commandments and the statutes and ordinances, details; all these matters are really the expression of the will of God. And Moses puts this attractively before the people. He says, having done this, you can say to the Lord, “Look down from thy holy habitation, from the heavens, and bless thy people Israel”. Of course, the Lord looks down in any case, but it is a good thing to have a sense of fulfilling the requirement and, you might say, inviting the Lord to look down from the heavens, “Look down from thy holy habitation” and find conditions here in agreement with His holy habitation up there. That is not impossible. That is what fulfilled responsibility has in mind: “Look down from thy holy habitation, from the heavens”. Later on the heavens are spoken of as the settled place of God’s dwelling but then when Solomon built the temple, that also was a settled place of God’s dwelling. We have a settled place in heaven—nothing can shake or alter that—but there is a settled place on the earth and that is what this supposes: “Look down from thy holy habitation, from the heavens” and find conditions in agreement with what is up there, conditions of separation, conditions of sanctification, “thy holy habitation, from the heavens” and find on the earth what is suitable, what is in concert with what is up there. How attractive that idea is! How attractive to the Lord to be able to look down and see these conditions.

Well, we have much to be thankful for, I am sure of that, in our city and in many other localities, but if the Lord looks down on a locality and sees brethren at sixes and sevens, what do you think about that? When he looked down on Corinth and the confusion that was there, it must have grieved the heart of the Lord Jesus; it must have grieved the Holy Spirit to see such conditions. Instead of being in concert with His holy habitation up there, there was confusion down here, party attitude, brethren divided, different views. How sad that is! We need to be concerned that that kind of thing does not come into our locality, that we are able to help one another and consider for the Lord first in every matter. It is very attractive, is it not, saying to the Lord, “Look down from thy holy habitation, from the heavens, and bless thy people Israel, and the land that thou hast given us as thou didst swear unto our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey!” That suggests the Lord’s faithfulness, swearing to their fathers, and finding a resting-place, finding a settled place, finding conditions with which He is pleased down here.

The Lord told His disciples to pray “let thy will be done as in heaven so upon the earth” (Matt 6: 10), heaven and earth in concert, heaven and earth in accord. What an attractive situation that is! It ought to be attractive to every one of us. It is worthwhile going through exercise. It is worthwhile being concerned and to see to all matters that we need to see to that such conditions should exist, eternal life for our enjoyment but also what is pleasing to God. The psalmist says, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Psalm 133: 1. It is “pleasant” for the brethren; it is “pleasant” for the Lord too as He looks down from His holy habitation and finds conditions of sanctification and of unity down here in our localities. It ought to be so. We have had so much ministry and get so much ministry, so many exhortations we get, so many reminders as to the level at which we ought to be. We need to answer to these things.

The next section is very beautiful. It says, “This day Jehovah thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and ordinances; and thou hast keep and do them with all thy heart and with all thy soul. Thou hast this day accepted Jehovah to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and keep his statutes, and his commandments and his ordinances, and to hearken unto his voice”, v 16, 17. Is that our attitude? Is that our committal? Then it says, “and Jehovah hath accepted thee this day to be a people of possession to him, as he hath told thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments”. It is a thing we are to be committed to. That is, He can look down from His holy habitation; the idea is so interesting and so encouraging. Along with that we need to commit ourselves and if we commit ourselves to the Lord, He will commit Himself to us. It is like a covenant made, the covenant established here. Moses is not going into the land. He would have loved to have gone into the land. He is trying to impart to those who are going in his own feelings, his own appreciation of the land. He was disqualified but he tries to impart to the people his own keenness, his own desire, if only he could have. Well, may the Lord encourage us! It says, “that thou shouldest be a holy people to Jehovah thy God, as he hath said”, v 19. Well, holy is a very elevated word, but I think sanctification comes very near to holiness. Sometimes in the New Testament Mr Darby translates sanctification where it could be holiness, a sanctified people, sanctified persons, a sanctified company, practically in our localities. Well, may the Lord encourage us for our own pleasure and for the satisfaction of the Lord Himself, for His Name’s sake!

**EDINBURGH**

**23rd January 1990**

*This article is first published here, lightly edited and not revised by*

*Mr Renton*

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# ATTACHMENT BY GOD

**Deuteronomy 7: 7, 8**

These are the words of Moses, his own impression of what God’s people meant to Him. He said in verse 6, “For a holy people art thou unto Jehovah thy God: Jehovah thy God hath chosen thee to be unto him a people for a possession, above all the peoples that are upon the face of the earth”. It indicates how Jehovah valued His people. He said Himself in Exodus 19, “if ye will hearken to my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then shall ye be my own possession out of all the peoples - for all the earth is mine - and ye shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation”, vv 5, 6. It is what His people are to be to Him as something special, not only as the earth is His—of course it is His, He made it—but there is something on the earth that is a special possession.

We read, “Not because ye were more in number than all the peoples, hath Jehovah been attached to you and chosen you”. It is very affecting that Moses speaks about Jehovah being attached to them, not because they were more in number, not because of anything that men could take account of, but because Jehovah loved them. He was attached to them because He loved them. We are accustomed to speak about love as following attachment. We love the Lord Jesus by first of all becoming attached to Him, but here it is the reverse order, Jehovah was attached to them because He loved them. I suppose that love for us would involve His purpose. Moses said, He has chosen you. We are loved because in purpose we were chosen. His love is His attitude, it is the disposition of His heart; but then it says He has been “attached to you”. That is a very fine thing. Attachment involves something very personal, persons in whom God is interested. We sometimes speak about the disciples being attached to the Lord Jesus, and so they were, but think of the Lord Jesus attached to His disciples! Think of how He was attached to them, think of how He went in and out amongst them during the three and a half years of His service here! It says, “having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end”, John 13: 1. The Lord Jesus became attached to the disciples, and He would become attached to every one of us because of His love. His love is His general disposition, but “being attached to” is something personal. We would all do well to consider the Lord Jesus being attached to us; He certainly was attached to His disciples. He went in and out amongst them, He taught them, He cared for them, He acted as a father towards them. Three times over the Lord addresses them as His children, He cared for them as a father. He became attached to them. According to John’s gospel the Lord felt leaving them, He was so attached to them. They felt the Lord leaving them, but He felt leaving them. Think of the forty days in which He went in and out amongst them—not only His lifetime here, but in the forty days, was He not attached to them? He said to Mary, “I have not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren”, John 20: 17. He was so attached to His brethren that He did not immediately ascend to the Father; He was forty days among them and He felt leaving them, but He made ample provision for them. He speaks in John 14, 15 and 16 about the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. In effect the Lord says to the disciples, the Comforter will be just as much attached to you as I have been.

And so it is; think of the Holy Spirit attached to us, dear brethren. The Lord says about Him, “he abides with you, and shall be in you”, John 14: 17. Think of how near the Holy Spirit has come in His attachment to each one of us! We sang about being sealed, being sealed with the Spirit, owned as God’s property. Think of how the Spirit is attached to us! Once we receive the Spirit He remains with us. We have ignored Him, grieved Him, quenched Him, and yet He has become attached to us; He remains with us. The Lord Jesus was with the disciples a certain time, three and a half years, but He says about the Comforter, “that he may be with you for ever” (John 14: 16). He will not be like Me; He will not leave you, He will be with you for ever. As long as we need Him in the testimony down here, the Spirit will be here. Just consider, dear brethren, how the Holy Spirit has become attached to us because He loves us. We read in Romans 15 of “the love of the Spirit” (v 30); He loves us and has become attached to us, dwells in our bodies. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor 6: 19). How immediate is the Spirit’s presence with each believer. He has become attached to us.

Think of the Father being attached to us. The Lord said, “the Father himself has affection for you, because ye have had affection for me”, John 16: 27. That expression “has affection for” is the same as “attached to” it is the word *phileo*, the word that Peter used in John 21 when he said, “I am attached to thee”, and the Lord challenged him the third time, “Art thou attached to me?”. It is the same expression as having affection for; it might be translated, The Father Himself is attached to you, because ye have become attached to Me. Think of the Father’s love for His family, His committal to each one of us as belonging to His family, His children, His sons. It says here, “Not because ye were more in number than all the peoples, hath Jehovah been attached to you and chosen you, for ye are the fewest of all the peoples”: they were not of much account in men’s estimation—“but because Jehovah loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers”. That is God’s faithfulness, God’s faithful love.

Consider, dear brethren, for our encouragement that the Lord Jesus is committed to us and has become attached to us. The Holy Spirit is committed to us, sealed us, is attached to us. The Father in His love, His interest in us, has become attached to us. What a comfort this is! There is much to face, maybe for young people especially, much to confront them, difficulties, temptations, but oh, just to be conscious of divine attachment to each one of us!

May the Lord encourage us!

**EDINBURGH**

**8th May 1990**

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# THE INWARD MAN

**Romans 7: 22-25**

**2 Corinthians 4: 16-18**

**Ephesians 3: 14-19**

J.R. The thought is to look at this expression, “the inward man” and get some idea of what it means. In Romans 7 it is, “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man”. Every believer has what is spoken of here as the inward man. We may enquire as to what that is, but it is true of every real believer anyway. No doubt it begins with being born anew, born of water and of the Spirit, which is the moral character of that birth, and born of the Spirit, which is the spiritual beginning in every believer. That happens before he is converted, before he believes the gospel, but after one believes, the inward man is to be recognised, identified in every one of us, and promoted. The desires that are according to the inward man have to be fed so that there is what is for the pleasure of God in every believer down here.

We get the inward man in 2 Corinthians 4 over against the outward man—the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day. The inward man in Romans 7 is what is of God in the believer as over against propensities that belong to the believer as born of Adam’s fallen race; we have these propensities as long as we are here, but there is the inward man, and the inward man needs to be fed—the desires need to be gratified that belong to the inward man.

D.L.S. This inward man would not be limited to Christianity. It is something that always has been in those in whom God is working. A man like Job would illustrate it.

J.R. What you say is the truth. New birth is not peculiar to Christianity; it is true of believers who had faith all through the Old Testament and will be true of persons who come to light after the church goes, but the inward man would have special application in Christianity, would it not?

D.L.S. Yes, there is that in Christianity which would build up the inward man.

J.R. That is right. It is very important first of all for the believer to identify this inward man, that is, to identify certain desires, certain motives, that do not belong to Adam’s fallen race; they belong to what has been derived from the work of God and is of Christ in character. “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man”: in Psalm 40 the Lord says prophetically: “To do thy good pleasure, my God, is my delight, and thy law is within my heart”, v 8. Therefore the inward man has the character of what was in the Lord Himself in manhood. It is a very encouraging thing to be able to identify in one’s self what answers to the inward man.

R.S.R. In Romans 7 there is admixture. Would we seek not only to identify what is of the inward man but to promote it?

J.R. Yes, it has to be fed. We have the admixture as long as we are here. We never get entirely clear of the propensities that belong to Adam’s fallen race. We have all derived from Adam; from Satan came the poison of the serpent, and we all have that character which has to be starved, and the inward man fed.

G.A.B. ls it a secret thing? The flesh advertises itself but the force of ‘inward’ here is something which is precious to the eye of God. It has no place in this world’s system.

J.R. That is right: it comes from the sovereign operation of God. There is nothing of the old in the inward man: it is entirely different. Born anew emphasises the different character, it is of another character altogether. Born of water and of Spirit calls attention to the moral character of that birth, and born of the Spirit refers to the fact that every believer is spiritual potentially because of this work of God. It is a question of how we feed this inward man, how we gratify the desires of the inward man. It has been likened to a cage in which there is a raven and a dove. The thing is to starve the raven and feed the dove, feed the inward man, gratify these desires, not the desires that belong to us and which we all have as of Adam’s fallen race.

G.A.B. The world becomes a wilderness to the believer because there is nothing in it to satisfy the inward man.

J.R. That is right.

W.M.G. In Genesis 8 we have the raven and the dove going out of the ark; the dove found no place for the sole of its foot, but the raven did not come back.

J.R. There was an affinity between the dove and Noah. It says that he “brought her to him into the ark”, v 9. There is an affinity between Noah and the dove which was not between Noah and the raven. “He sent out the raven”—it never returned, but the dove returned to him into the ark. The inward man is illustrated in the Old Testament in Psalm 119 in one hundred and seventy-six verses; I would commend brethren to read through it. You find different experiences—reproach, discipline, all that kind of thing—but the inward man shines through: “Oh how I love thy law!”, v 97. There is one verse in that Psalm I would like to call attention to: “Thy word is exceeding pure, and thy servant loveth it”, v 140. It is not the word as his duty or what ought to be done; the word is love—“thy servant loveth it”. The word which is exceeding pure would no doubt be some fresh impression of the manhood of Jesus; that is what feeds the inward man.

R.S.R. Romans 7 speaks of another law; that would be a foreign element. It says, “But I see another law in my members, warring in opposition to the law of my mind”. Is that how we view it?

J.R. Yes, it is always there. As long as we are here the other law, the other principle, is there ready to take over, ready to present itself and seek gratification, but that principle has to be starved and the inward man fed, and what feeds the inward man is impressions of the manhood of Jesus.

W.D. Is it what is morally in accord with God? Is not the great issue with God and man the moral side of things? So the work of God is the promotion of the moral side in the believer giving him discernment in regard to what is pleasing to God.

J.R. Yes, the conflict that is being worked out in the believer, the conflict between good and evil. The inward man represents the good: the other principle is evil really.

W.D. We have to come into accord with the cross.

J.R. Yes, that conflict was seen at the cross—the victory of what is moral and according to God. It is worked out in the universe: it is worked out in the believer’s soul history.

R.S.R. Do you think Amalek would have some bearing on what you are saying? “Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation!”, Exod 17: 16. Is that something akin?

J.R. I think so.

J.D.G. When God established Adam in innocence, did he know at that time only the law of God?

J.R. Yes, l suppose he did. He would be a perfect creature from God’s hands; he was able to name the animals, for instance. He was a remarkably intelligent man until the serpent put his poison in.

J.D.G. Yes, Satan spoiled what was there in innocence. Now good and evil, as you say, has to be worked out in the believer in a scene where initially evil had the ascendancy because of the fall. Humanity was spoiled, but God plans over that.

J.R. Exactly. First of all the believer needs to identify this inward man and then be exercised to promote and feed that work of God—a most important thing to come to. We will make no progress really until we do.

J.R.C. Once or twice in the last few days we have been exhorted in regard to saying ‘No’. I like your reference to that Psalm because it is an advance on that; he goes on to say, “and thy servant loveth it”. That is more than just saying ‘No’. It is something that you treasure more than other things.

J.R. I would think that that love is maintained by continuing to say ‘No’. Saying ‘no’ would be starving this other law, but loving God’s word would be feeding the inward man. We need to realise that there is with every believer the inward man which needs to be promoted, needs to be fed, and the other deprived. The inward man has certain desires, certain motives which come from God which are akin to the desires and motives of the Lord Jesus Himself as Man. It is a wonderful thing to identify that.

J.R.C. It is very confirming for us all, and especially for the young people, to find, at times it may be, that Christ becomes more precious to them than anything else. The assembly becomes more attractive to them, and the brethren, too, more lovable. These are things which they grow in and think about.

J.R. That is just the truth.

W.D. So in chapter 8 the Spirit is the power to say ‘Yes’ to what is good; it is like Genesis 24: “Wilt thou go with this man?”, v 58.

J.R. Yes: also the power to say ‘No’—“but if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live”, v 13. We need the Spirit to maintain the ‘No’, but the Spirit would feed us with Christ. He would promote this inward man and call attention to the Lord Jesus who is food for the believer. The Lord Jesus has become Man to be food for us. It is the manhood of Jesus we feed on. That is one of the reasons He is Man, to strengthen us and to promote this inward man with every one of us.

D.H.M. When Adam was placed in the garden, that area of privilege, he was told to till it and to guard it. I suppose the failure to guard it was how the serpent came in. The serpent is a beast of the field, not the garden.

J.R. That is right. He was more “crafty than any animal of the field”, Gen 3: 1. Paul speaks about “his craft”, 2 Cor 11: 3. He is ever crafty.

R.S.R. It speaks of captivity: “bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which exists in my members”, but the divine intent is that we should be at liberty and that would be in chapter 8.

J.D.G. He has to find a deliverer in this section. He is delighting “in the law of God according to the inward man”, but he needs a deliverer, he needs some Person to help him, one outside of himself, a deliverer.

J.R. That is right. It is really the eye set on Christ as a deliverer, and then the Spirit is the power for deliverance. “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord” involves the lordship of Christ. The Lord Jesus becomes his object, and the Spirit supports that and is the means of deliverance.

J.D.G. Looking to Christ brings out life, the eye fixed on Him; it is like Numbers 21, the brazen serpent, they looked intently, see note to v 9. But the power to maintain that is in the Spirit.

J.R. Yes. I was impressed by reading John 3. It says, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up, that every one who believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”. Now, “every one who believes on him” I think, would be on Him where He is. We speak about looking at the Lord’s death; I know what is meant, but it is Him: “every one who believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”. It is coming into life by believing in Him, which would be looking on Him.

J.D.G. It is good to get the context of that scripture. It would involve Him as the One who is lifted up. Your thought is that it relates to Him where He is.

J.R. I think so. It is “believes on him”: “And no one has gone up into heaven, save he who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up”—that would refer, of course, to His crucifixion—“that every one who believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”. Some people have a cross round their neck. That is not the idea. It is believing on Him as He is, where He is, as the object of our faith.

J.D.G. John in his epistle certainly links the thought of the appropriation of eternal life with Christ where He is.

J.R. Exactly, and He is to be our object. It is only Christ, only the Lord Jesus in manhood who can satisfy the desires that the work of God produces. Take the eunuch who was in the desert (see Acts 8); there was a vacancy, a longing with the man. He could not tell you what it was, but only Christ could fill it, and that is the inward man. Only Christ can promote and satisfy the inward man; therefore the first thing is to identify the inward man and then be exercised to feed him, and the food is Christ, Christ as Man, the features of obedience, subjection. I thought this morning of a hymn that we do not have in the hymn book now—

We think of Thy devotion,

Thy blest obedience rare;

Thy holy, deep emotion,

Thy grief that none could share.

Thus to our hearts Thou speakest; ...

It is that kind of thing.

R.S.R. The “I myself” is emphatic. Is that related to the inward man?

J.R. Yes, the inward man is the real “I”, and, as you said earlier, the other becomes a foreign element; but it has to be worked out, and it is worked out by identifying the inward man.

D.L.S. Room is not left for the operations of the old man as Christ is made much of in the heart and life of the believer.

J.R. Exactly. That has been your experience?

D.L.S. Well, I would like to know more of it.

J.R. But that has been your experience, that has been the experience of older brethren here. Let us understand that we have all come this way. That would encourage others who are setting out on this way. We begin by identifying the inward man and by being exercised to promote and feed that feature. It becomes the “I myself”.

D.C. In verse 23 the concern is that through the law of sin in the members he is brought into captivity, but then in verse 25 it says, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I myself with the mind serve God’s law”. He puts himself into captivity there.

J.R. Exactly, “serve God’s law”. Liberty, I find, is a difficult subject to speak about because the believer finds liberty by coming into bondage. In chapter 6 it says, “For even as ye have yielded your members in bondage to uncleanness and to lawlessness unto lawlessness, so now yield your members in bondage to righteousness unto holiness”, v 19. It is by serving that we come into liberty, we come under authority.

D.C. You serve as a bondman.

J.R. That is the idea. Maybe the first scripture is for young believers, although for all of us, but the one in 2 Corinthians would be for all of us, maybe especially for those of us who are older. “Wherefore we faint not; but if indeed our outward man is consumed, yet the inward is renewed day by day”. The outward would be the weakening of the vessel by wear and tear especially by discipline which this chapter speaks about—persecution, suffering; the outward is fragile and becomes feeble, but the inward is renewed. If we see the inward man of Romans 7 in Psalm 119, I think we see the inward man according to Corinthians in Jacob. He passed through much discipline; it was personal up to chapter 35 of Genesis, but after that he was disciplined in his family. How many are disciplined in their families. He was at least twenty years without Joseph, and did he not feel that, did he not weep over Joseph? Then the brethren come back from their first visit without Simeon, and then they spoke of taking away Benjamin. How he felt all these things! Then he became feeble in body, and they told Joseph, “Behold, thy father is sick” (Gen 48: 1), but the inward man is renewed. He strengthened himself and sat upon his bed and blessed Joseph’s sons, and indeed blessed the whole family. It is an illustration of the outward perishing. Those of us who are older know something of the outward perishing, but the inward needs to be renewed, maintained in vigour, and that is what goes through, goes through into eternity.

R.S.R. Say more about how this renewal day by day takes place. Would it be occupation with Christ as our object and allowing the Spirit to magnify Him?

J.R. That is what I understand. There are remarkable statements in the earlier part of the chapter about the Lord Jesus. It speaks about “the radiancy of the glad tidings of the glory of the Christ, who is the image of God” (v 4); it speaks about, “For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus Lord, and ourselves your bondmen for Jesus’ sake”; it speaks about “the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”. Then it speaks about, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels”—I suppose earthen vessels could be likened to the outward man—and then it speaks about, “every way afflicted, but not straitened; seeing no apparent issue, but our way not entirely shut up; persecuted, but not abandoned; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying”—or ‘putting to death’—“of Jesus”. In this epistle Paul refers to intense suffering, persecution; he despaired of living (see chap 1: 8)—he is referring to what he had come through—but then he says, the outward man is perishing, “yet the inward is renewed day by day”.

R.T. I was wondering if it links with the scripture that says the good work that is begun in you will be completed, see Phil 1: 6. I was thinking especially of some who are older amongst us who are laid aside in much weakness, and yet we can think of the Spirit’s work, the completing going on.

J.R. Very good. Some become oblivious to all that is around, but if you speak about the Lord you get response, the inward man comes through; it is life. It is a fine thing to witness. Jacob must have been a very attractive man in his old age. He was not always commendable in his younger days, but in his latter days he was a greater man morally than Pharaoh. He went in and blessed Pharaoh. David is another one who would answer to this. David had a lot of discipline with his family. At the end of his life he said, “Although my house be not so before God”, 2 Sam 23: 5. He would have loved his house to be with God. It was discipline to his spirit. He must have been a very attractive man in his old age; we have the last words of David.

R.S.R. I was thinking of Jacob, “the God that shepherded me all my life long to this day”, Gen 48: 15. That would be like the renewal day by day.

J.R. Surely.

J.R.C. We can understand why discipline became a necessary feature in Jacob’s life in order to secure the divine end.

J.R. Exactly. David was disciplined, but he brought much of it on himself, and we have brought much on ourselves, but God uses it all in view of this inward man developing, being renewed day by day. How gracious God is! He can turn our failings into what is of value for Himself.

R.S.R. Jacob at one point says, “All these things are against me” (Gen 42: 36), but the truth is they were all working out to bring about a positive result and make him a worshipper.

J.R. He was a remarkable father. Only one of Abraham’s sons came into the testimony and only one of Isaac’s sons, but Jacob had all his family in the end, the result of much toil, many tears; he could not be comforted at one stage, but the inward man came through remarkably.

G.A.B. Could you say what you understand by the life of Jesus being manifested in our body, v 10.

J.R. “Always bearing about in the body the dying”—or ‘putting to death’—“of Jesus that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body”. The inward man would manifest the life of Jesus. If we feed on the manhood of Jesus, that kind of life would be manifested.

G.A.B. Does it refer to His pathway here or does it go further than that? One of the things that the apostles were told to do was to speak all the words of this life, see Acts 5: 20.

J.R. Exactly. He goes on to say, “for we who live are always delivered unto death on account of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh”. Therefore it is the life of Jesus expressed here. It must involve the inward man the treasure in earthen vessels.

G.A.B. It is something that can be identified down here in the absence of Christ which is morally of the same nature, which Paul: or Saul as he was at the time, first came into touch with in Damascus. The Lord said, “Why dost thou persecute me”, Acts 9: 4.

J.R.C. That is why the eunuch—you have referred to him already—saw immediately the need for baptism, and then he went on his way rejoicing. That would be the life of Jesus here in another man.

J.R. That is right. He would go home, maybe the only believer there, but what would shine out in him would be the life of Jesus, in principle, in testimony.

J.R.C. All our young people here have been baptised, and maybe it takes a little time for the impact to come home to them of what it really meant.

J.R. I am sure that is right.

W.D. It is the inward man that goes into eternity, is it not?

J.R. Exactly, and only the inward man; nothing of the natural, nothing, of course, of the flesh, nothing that belongs to the man of Adam’s fallen race. It really involves new creation, only it is generation which involves life. It speaks about “our momentary and light affliction”; it is how Paul could view all these sufferings and experiences he went through. “For our momentary and light affliction works for us in surpassing measure an eternal weight of glory”. It is a way of discipline, a way in which God is pleased to promote this inward man, in our experience.

W.D. I was thinking of your reference to food. It is a very extensive subject in Scripture. There is a series of readings on the food that abides, JT vol 16. We have to appropriate the divine supplies and food in its various character so that for each change in circumstances this development is taking place.

J.R. Exactly. The manna would come into this. Deuteronomy 8 speaks about the manna. It says, “And thou shalt remember all the way which Jehovah thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or not. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with the manna, which thou hadst not known, and which thy fathers knew not; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by everything that goeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live”, vv 2, 3. That is the manna, every word that goes out of God’s mouth; a fresh impression of Christ, which is meant to sustain us day by day and promote this inward man.

W.D. There is the passover lamb, all entering into the moral side of things in the believer, helping him to appreciate Christ.

J.R. That is right, the food is always Christ, the manhood of Jesus. That is what is available to us in Jesus as Man. We feed on a Man, God expressed in a Man, and therefore we take on the features of that Man.

R.S.R. What would you say about “an eternal weight of glory”?

J.R. It is in contrast to the light affliction. It is momentary and light and works in surpassing measure an eternal weight; it is something substantial. The momentary and light affliction will pass; no matter what we go through, it will all pass. What remains is this weight of glory.

G.B. Jacob had his name changed to Israel. He was the supplanter, and he became a prince of God. Would that be the inner man coming through?

J.R. That is fine. What a lesson book Jacob is!

D.L.S. Could you remark on verse 18—the question of what we look at. It is not only food but “while we look” something is happening, building up is going on while we look at the things that are unseen.

J.R. What do you say about the things that are not seen?

D.L.S. It would embrace the sphere of things where Christ is exalted and where He has His way.

J.R. That is fine. In Ephesians we have “the inner man”. It is the inner man by himself, not the inward man in contrast to the flesh, nor the inward man in contrast to the outward man, but the inner man by himself. Rebecca illustrates this section. It speaks about, “to be strengthened with power by his Spirit”—the Father’s Spirit—“in the inner man”. It was the father Abraham who sent the servant to Rebecca, and she was strengthened with power by the servant’s presentation of Isaac. There is a response with Rebecca; it was the inner man with Rebecca that fully responded to what the Father’s Spirit, shall we say, brought in. She was in principle “strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man; that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts”. Isaac was dwelling in her heart, and then” the breadth and length and depth and height” would be like the dominion of Isaac. Abraham gave all he had to Isaac, see Gen 24: 36; 25: 5. Rebecca illustrates this section here.

W.M.G. She said “I will go”. She was ready to go the full way, whatever it cost her too, leaving her own relatives.

J.R. Yes, not only did she say “I will go”, but it says, “And Rebecca arose, and her maids, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man. And the servant took Rebecca”, Gen 24: 61. The servant waited not only till she said “I will go” but until she moved. She arose and then the servant took her and brought her to Isaac. What, typically, the Father’s Spirit, what Abraham’s servant presented to Rebecca captivated her. Her name means ‘captivating’; it is like what is here. It is the Father’s Spirit strengthening with power in the inner man. What was in Rebecca responded fully. She is perfect; there is no failure with Rebecca in this chapter.

R.S.R. Is there a distinction then between the inward man we have been considering and the inner man in Ephesians?

J.R. All I would say is that the inward man in both scriptures is contrasted with something else, either the flesh or the outward, but here it is the inner man by itself in contrast to nothing else, just the inner man, and that is what goes through into eternity.

W.D. Rebecca was a type of the assembly. Do you think it might have a bearing towards what is collective? The other two scriptures would be intensely individual.

J.R. Quite so. Paul goes on to say, “in order that ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height”. Would we all desire to be like Rebecca?

W.D. It takes the service of God out of the realm of orthodoxy, and there is something in the inner man being worked collectively in the affections of the saints.

J.R. That is right. The inner man is the same in you as in me, and the same in every believer. The inward man is of the same character in every one; therefore the inward man being fed would make for unity. The trouble is that sometimes other things come in, but this is the inner man by itself, which is a very fine consideration.

W.M.G. Has it not been said that being “strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man” is something that we may experience in the service of God?

J.R. I would think so. But it says, “to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man; that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love”. It is the kind of persons we become. Of course, it would be liberated in the service of God, but what kind of persons are we? We do not just jump into the service of God; it is a question of what kind of persons we are every day of the week.

W.M.G. Characteristically. So this is an experience that we can have any day of the week, you mean; it does not necessarily have to be confined to the Lord’s day morning.

R.S.R. It shows the importance of the Spirit. It all flows from “strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man; that the Christ...” and so on. Does it not show how invaluable the Spirit of God is for strengthening and power?

J.R. You can see it in Rebecca. Abraham’s servant brought the word, presented Isaac, and Rebecca was captivated. Isaac dwelt through faith in her heart until she reached him. Throughout the journey Isaac was dwelling through faith in her heart.

R.S.R. That is why she sprang off the camel.

J.R. Surely; she is fresh at the end of the journey.

E.W.J. Do you think that we need the Spirit? The normal setting is “that the Christ may dwell, through faith”, and things become expanded from there. Jesus said “He shall glorify me” (John 16: 14), and expansion comes in as Christ gets His place.

J.R. It means that we have an appreciation of Christ like the Father’s appreciation, the Father’s Spirit giving us to appreciate the Lord Jesus as the Father appreciates Him. The Father’s Spirit would have that in mind. Abraham’s servant presented Isaac, and Rebecca responded in the· same way as Abraham regarded Isaac. Abraham loved Isaac. He committed all he had to him. That was Abraham’s outlook on Isaac, while Abraham’s servant produced or brought out of Rebecca the same kind of affection.

R.S.R. We sang this morning,

We taste the same delight

(Hymn No 26).

The Father’s delight in Christ, of course, is infinite; yet our delight is in Him too.

J.R. It is really the fulfilment of John 17: “And I have made known to them thy name, and will make it known; that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them”, v 26. That is Rebecca again, the love with which Abraham loved Isaac was in Rebecca, and Isaac was in Rebecca’s heart. It is fine to see it in Rebecca, but may we all be exercised that it is found with every one of us. It is not beyond our reach.

G.A.B. Does the veil that Rebecca took bear on what you are saying? There was no rival to Christ in her affections, and she contrasted him with no other, so she herself is to be for no other.

J.R. It is one of the types; Isaac only had Rebecca and Rebecca only had Isaac. There are a few types like that, Adam, for instance, and Isaac and Joseph and Boaz, as far as we know. Other ideas come in in other types but with this one Isaac only had Rebecca and Rebecca only had Isaac. It is a very fine thing to think of, and we want these affections in our hearts now.

W.D. I have had an exercise for some time lately that practically, after we give the Spirit His portion, we tend in our thoughts to dispense with Him. We seem to think that is the climax of His service, and we respond to Him in thanksgiving and worship, but we should not so regard it; we should think of the Spirit always with us right to the very end of the service.

J.R. Hymn 89 that we had this morning would help what you say:

O blessed Holy Spirit,

Thy power is with us now,

As we approach the Father

Before His face to bow.

—and so on.

We need the Spirit. It is through the Lord Jesus by one Spirit that we approach the Father, see Eph 2: 18.

W.D. The point is to think that way, not to say, We have reached a certain matter in regard to the Spirit and that is the end of it but we must carry it forward.

J.R. Surely, carry all forward; we carry everything forward, right to the conclusion of the meeting. “Through him” would involve that we carry with us appreciation of the Lord Jesus. “By one Spirit”, we carry with us appreciation of the Holy Spirit and thus we are presentable and pleasing to the Father.

J.T.B. Is this the normalcy of spiritual experience in the believer? The other two scriptures are somewhat different, involving contrast, but the inner man is the normalcy of spiritual experience, and becomes the vehicle and repository for the directive power of the Spirit so that Christ is dwelling through faith in our hearts.

J.R. It is ‘dwelling’ not ‘visiting’, “through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love, in order that ye may be fully able to apprehend”. I was thinking of the domain that Isaac had. Rebecca came into the appreciation of that.

D.G.C. The first we see of Rebecca is bearing the pitcher, and in type she engages herself in service to the Spirit. I was thinking about sowing to the Spirit; day by day, as we would sow to the Spirit there would be familiarity and the Spirit would strengthen us in this way.

J.R. Yes. She came to the well, she lived by the well. She found her resource in principle in the Spirit as a well, an inexhaustible supply.

D.S.Jr. I was interested in this expression, “rooted and founded in love”. It is something which is substantial as formed in the heart.

J.R. Very good; that is it. “Rooted” would be the idea of a tree and “founded” is the idea of a building; a foundation is very important. “In love”, it says. “And to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge”: we will never exhaust the love of the Christ; that would involve not only His love for us but all He has done in love, all His operations in love. There is plenty of room to expand in this area.

J.R.C. Would that involve, “I love my master, my wife, and my children”, Exod 21: 5?

J.R. Very good; it certainly would, “the love of the Christ”. We could never exhaust that it passes knowledge, but we know it, and respond to it.

**EDINBURGH**

**17th June 1990**

**Key to initials**

*Edinburgh if not otherwise stated*

G.Bailey; D.C.Brown; G.A.Brown; J.T.Brown; D.G.Coull, Aberdeen; J.R.Cumming; W.Dickson; J.D.Gray; W.M.Grosse; E.W.Johnstone; D.H.Marshall, J.Renton; R.S.Renton; D.Scougal, Jr; D.L.Stewart; R.Trotter

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# THE LORD’S DAY

**Psalm 19: 4-7**

**Song of Songs 2: 8-9**

This Psalm speaks of the physical sun and its movements. It rises at dawn and goes forth from one end of heaven to the other end of heaven. It, no doubt, is a type of the Lord Jesus and what He will be in the world to come; His benign light and sway will dominate the universe. In Matthew 17, where the Lord was pleased to give to His disciples a preview of the world to come, He was transfigured and His face shone as the sun. The end of Malachi speaks of the Sun of righteousness arising with healing in His wings. The sun would have a reference, therefore, to the benign dominion of the Lord Jesus in the world to come. In Ezekiel 43, when the glory appears, it says, “and the earth was lit up with his glory”, v 21. Sunshine begins at dawn and goes through the whole day.

I would like to apply this to the Lord’s day. The world to come will, in a sense, be the Lord’s day. It would be a day of a thousand years when He dominates, when He is pre­eminent as Man, but we anticipate that world to come on what we call the Lord’s day. It is one day in the week when the Lord has something special for Himself. I would like to call attention to what the Lord’s day means to the Lord Jesus. We often speak and delight in what the Lord’s day means for us, a day of privilege, but let us think for a moment of what it means for the Lord Jesus, a whole day when He gets response in a special way. Of course He gets response every day, but there is something special about the Lord’s day which for the Lord begins in New Zealand. Dawn is there. The Lord is active that whole day right over the earth. I suppose the day finishes at Vancouver, that dateline. Think of what it means for the Lord Jesus, such a full day for Him. We come together to partake of the Lord’s supper, and it means much for us, but He has been active in a special way before this. It says, “And he is as a bridegroom going forth from his chamber”. Think of “his going forth”. It is written from His point of view—“his going forth”. In a sense He is always with believers in the suffering setting in which we are: we speak about His coming to us but there is something special about the Lord’s day. “And he is as a bridegroom”: think of the affection of the Lord Jesus beginning the Lord’s day! I think it can be applied that way. “And he is as a bridegroom going forth from his chamber”—whatever that means—“he rejoiceth as a strong man to run the race”. Think of the affection of the Bridegroom and the joy, rejoicing “as a strong man to run the race”, and the activity of the Lord Jesus on the Lord’s day, touching our hearts by His love, leading us in response to the Spirit, to the Father, to God. What a wonderful activity of affection, wonderful activity of power and of joy, rejoicing “as a strong man to run the race”! It says, “His going forth is from the end of the heavens, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof”. This influence is meant to affect us—“nothing hid from the heat thereof”, the warmth and influence of the Lord’s love in this wonderful circuit which He is engaged in, especially on the Lord’s day. The Lord does not come corporeally—it is all by the Spirit, it is all spiritual, and that is what tests us; it challenges our spirituality and our reality. The Lord does not come physically; all this movement in the present dispensation is by the Spirit. It will be actual in the world to come, but there is something of that same character by the Spirit at the present time.

It goes on to speak about the law of Jehovah, the testimony of Jehovah, the precepts of Jehovah, the commandment of Jehovah, the fear of Jehovah, the judgments of Jehovah. That would involve persons who are subject to Him. The Lord says in John 14, “He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me ... and I will love him and will manifest myself to him” (v 21); these are the kind of persons the Lord manifests Himself to, who get the benefit of His circuit which the Lord is occupied with on the Lord’s day. This is really by the Spirit at the present time. Then, verses 7, 8 and 9 present the kind of persons to whom the Lord manifests Himself, who get the benefit of His movements. Because we belong to a certain company of persons is no guarantee that we will enter into all that is involved in this. This Psalm is from the Lord’s point of view, His going forth, and the extent of His circuit and His activities.

In the Song of Songs it is from our point of view. It is not “his going forth”, it is, “Behold, he cometh”, that is, we gather in each time zone, beginning in New Zealand time zone right over to Vancouver, Los Angeles and San Francisco, we gather and look for His coming. The language in the Song of Songs is the language of those who expect Him, the expectation of affection. “The voice of my beloved! Behold, he cometh”. In Psalm 19 it is “his going forth”, it is from His point of view, His standpoint, but this is from our standpoint. It says, “Behold, he cometh Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills”. It could be likened to the dawn, to the sun coming up; “Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills”; it could be the sun as a figure. “My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart”; it is the activity, the agility of affection. It says, “Behold, he standeth behind our wall”; “our wall” is a local idea, the Lord coming to each locality—“our wall” in Edinburgh and in other places, persons in localities getting the benefit of the rising of the sun. “He looketh in through the windows”, the sun “glancing through”; that is the idea.

In Psalm 19 it is “his going forth”, and this is His coming, persons who have His commandments and keep them, expectant of His coming, and gradually it dawns on us that we realise His presence. May the Lord encourage us and give us to think a little of what the Lord’s day means for Him as well as for us. May He quicken our affections for Him for His Name’s sake.

**EDINBURGH**

**8th January 1991**

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# PAUL’S PREACHING TO THE CORINTHIANS

**1 Corinthians 15: 1-5**

**2 Corinthians 1: 18-22**

I have been thinking, dear friends, about these presentations of the glad tidings in the city of Corinth. God had interests there. God said he had “much people” there (Acts 18: 10), and, while there was opposition, God announced that He had many interests in the city of Corinth. Paul remained there eighteen months, which is a long time for him to be in a place, then he wrote two long epistles, which shows God’s interest in this locality of Corinth, and Paul in this fifteenth chapter begins the chapter by going over what he had preached to them, how he had presented the Saviour to them in Corinth. Now, that had been some time ago. It began at the beginning of the eighteen months and continued, I suppose, through these eighteen months, then he was absent, and things did not proceed as they ought to have. Like many of us, our Christian pathway has not been a smooth one. There have been ups and downs, a good deal of downs, and so it was at Corinth, but Paul recalls them to how they started. ‘If ye have started’, he says. He says, “unless indeed ye have believed in vain”. You know, it is a great matter to have a right start in the Christian way, to begin right, to have a solid foundation, to be sure. He says, “which I announced to you, which also ye received, in which also ye stand, by which also ye are saved”. These are very important matters. What have we received? Have we all received something? Have we all received the glad tidings? He goes on to say what the glad tidings are, but he raises this question. He says, “which also ye received”, then he says, “(if ye hold fast the word which I announced to you as the glad tidings,) unless indeed ye have believed in vain”. It seems to be possible to make a nominal assent to the glad tidings, to make a kind of superficial show, shall we say? But Paul questions them as he would question us all, “which also ye received”.

How do we receive? We receive by means of repentance. That is how we receive. The Corinthians who were real received by means of repentance. There is only one way, and that is repentance. He goes on to say, “Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures”. He is speaking to believers. But he says, “which also ye received”, and I want to emphasise we receive by repentance. We receive by acknowledging our true sinnership before God. We are sinners. Each one of us is a sinner and each one of us needs a Saviour. The Saviour is available, but it comes by way of repentance, and repentance is a deep work. It is the result of the conscience operating; it is the result of conviction. Have we all been convicted as to our sins? This is basic and very elementary, but it is extremely important that we start right by way of repentance, by way of conviction of being a sinner and of our helplessness, in need of a Saviour. The Saviour is available but there is a way in which the glad tidings are received, “which also ye received, in which also ye stand”.

There is stability in receiving by means of repentance, this inward work of conviction, of conscience and, of course, of heart too. “In which also ye stand”: that is we are to be in personal stability, assured that we have had to do with God. It is to God we repent. The Saviour is available, but it is to God we repent. It is God we have offended. It is God who has made a way for us by way of the glad tidings, but it is to God we repent. We have to do with God. We are His creatures and whether now or hereafter, we will certainly have to do with God and we receive by means of conviction and repentance.

“In which also ye stand”, there is something stable, something in our souls, that is going to stand against all the opposition, whatever it may be, persecution, reproach, or whatever it may be, “in which also ye stand, by which also ye are saved”. That is not only saved for heaven, which is very, very important, but saved in our daily walk down here “by which also ye are saved”. That is “received”, “stand, by which also ye are saved, (if ye hold fast the word which I announced to you as the glad tidings)”. “If”, he says, “if ye hold fast”. Well, *if* the work is real, *if* the work of conviction and repentance, God’s work, is real, then we will hold fast. We stand in stability and we hold fast to that. “Unless indeed ye have believed in vain”: a very solemn phrase that is! He would challenge them as to whether they were real, had made a real beginning, had a real foundation in their souls, “unless indeed ye have believed in vain”.

Then he says, “For I delivered to you, in the first place, what also I had received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures”. That is addressed to believers. “Christ died for our sins”. He died for the sins of believers. We cannot say in the same sense that He died for the sins of everybody although His propitiatory work is available for everybody, but Christ died for our sins. That is believers. What a thing to have in our souls that Christ died for our sins. Again it supposes that we own we are sinners; we own that we have sinned and therefore need to be forgiven our sins. “Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures”. That is, it is not an after-thought. It was foreknown, foreseen. From the very beginning God knew that He had the resource, the reserve. Right through the Old Testament He had the reserve to righteously be able to forgive sins. “Christ died for our sins,”—it is the Christian “our”, dear friend—“according to the scriptures; and that he was buried”.

Think of the Lord being buried! His death is one thing, His sufferings, His being abandoned by God, His sufferings on the cross, that was one thing, but to think of Jesus being buried! All the gospels tell us about His burial, being put out of sight. You know, only believers saw Him after that. Unbelievers never saw Him after He was buried. It was the end as far as they were concerned. He was buried. And He has been rejected since. He has been absent since. He was buried, buried instead of believers, “died for our sins”, and His burial is part of that, of that work. He was put out of God’s sight. Think of what it meant for God for Jesus to be buried: “and that he was buried”. Few words, but oh how deep is the meaning of them! It is simple language: “Christ died for our sins,” sins of believers, “according to the scriptures; and that he was buried”. A time is going to come when the Lord is going to be manifested, and He is going to shine. His glory is going to shine. But meantime He is absent. Meantime He is rejected. As far as the world is concerned, He was buried. He does not shine as a great hero in this world and, therefore, to be in keeping with that, with His burial, we do not expect to make a mark in this world. Our Lord is rejected. He was “buried”. There is some deep meaning in that. He was buried, put out of sight, great terminus in a sense, burial. Death is one thing, but burial is another. There is a kind of finality about burial. Not for the believer, of course, because he is going to be raised and not for the Lord Jesus because it says, “and that he was buried;”—I am impressed with that remark—“and that he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures”, “raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom 6: 4), raised by God Himself, showing God’s infinite delight in the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is where He is now as raised, “raised the third day, according to the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas” and these persons. There is ample proof here about the resurrection of Christ, that He is living. The fact is, dear friend, that a believer can say my sins were once on Jesus. He died for our sins. Each believer can say, ‘He died for my sins’. My sins were being borne by Him, but He is raised from the dead, and the believer can say, ‘My sins are no longer on Him and they are no longer on me either’. He is raised for our justification.

He died for our sins, raised for our justification. Wonderful thing to be justified. Justification is how God views the believer whether the believer knows it or not. God views the believer as justified. Because of his faith, his repentance towards God, his faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, God views the believer as justified and He gives the believer liberty to have the light of that, to know that he is justified in the sight of God. He is as much justified as Jesus is because Jesus once bore the believer’s sins, but He no longer bears the believer’s sins. He is free from these sins. Of course, He is! And the believer is free as well, “raised for our justification”, Rom 4: 25. To be justified is God viewing the believer, as testified, as if he had never sinned. Wonderful truth!

Well, all this is for our benefit, for our relief. We receive and we stand and we are saved and “Christ died for our sins … was buried .. raised the third day”. It is all for our benefit, and that is what the glad tidings conveys, the importance of being relieved, the importance of knowing entire relief and liberty. This is all for our benefit. We read elsewhere that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”, 1 Tim 1: 15. That is the purpose for which He came. And this is fulfilled here. And these believers can be in the good and benefit of why “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”. Well, this is for our benefit, and I would like to emphasise the importance of it that we stand as having to do with God, as those for whose sins Christ has died, was buried and raised again. We need to be assured, to receive and stand and be saved in the light of what the Lord Jesus has accomplished for each one of us, for our blessing. This is for our blessing and our relief, our encouragement.

Now in the second epistle it is not only for our benefit and for our relief, but it speaks about the Son of God, “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, he who has been preached by us among you (by me and Silvanus and Timotheus)”. The Son of God brings in a different idea. It is not only what there is for us. 1 Corinthians 15 is the benefit *we* received, and I would emphasise the importance of each one of us having the benefit and being in the good of what the glad tidings would have in mind for *us* , for each one of us. Again I say, “received, in which ye stand, by which also ye are saved”: it is all for our benefit, for our salvation, daily salvation, encouragement, hope: all we need is available to us in the glad tidings.

But then the Son of God comes from God. It is a question of relationship. It is God’s Son, God’s ideal. He has come not only to save sinners, not only to be of benefit to sinners, but He has come that there might be some result for God. The Son of God has in view some result for God, some result for God’s glory, for God’s praise, to secure souls for the glory and the pleasure and the will of God. The Son of God has the will of God in mind. It is incidentally, of course, blessing for us, but it has in mind what is to be secured for the pleasure of God. Paul writes in this epistle about “the assembly of God” (chap 1: 1), for instance, “God’s temple” (chap 6: 16), the kingdom of God. It is a question of what is for God, what is for His pleasure now. The kingdom will be established in the future, publicly, but it exists now in persons down here and it is not only for our relief, it is for the pleasure and for the glory of God, for God’s service, that there might be an answer to God. After all, you see, God made man. Man is the specialty of God’s creation, not angels. Angels are incidental. The … angels are incidental. The great purpose of God is mankind, to have secured men for His pleasure. What a privilege it is to be secured for God’s pleasure! On the one hand, of course, I am not minimising the importance of our relief and our blessings, our future secured and all that kind of thing, but the Son of God has in mind what is for the pleasure and for the glory of God.

The Son of God is unique in that relationship. Think of the delight God had in His beloved Son down here! Think of the delight He has in His Son at His right hand, the delight the Father has in the Lord Jesus! It is distinctive, and yet believers are brought into the same relationship. Wonderful thing! He is “his only-begotten Son” (John 3: 16), but believers are brought into sonship by adoption. Wonderful truth! The Son of God has companions; the Son of God has associates; the Son of God came that He might have associates for the pleasure and glory of God, persons like Him, with Him now and eternally, sons, I say again, in the same relationship in which He is although He is *always* distinctive in any relationship He has. The wonderful thing is the Son of God came that God might secure sons and, dear fellow-believer, we are to be among them. How important it is, therefore, that there should be relief, and we should know our blessing and enjoy our blessing, but to have also in mind what the Son of God has in mind, and that is what is for the pleasure and for the glory of God. May we be encouraged!

That is what Paul has in mind in this epistle that they should be secured for the pleasure and glory of God. He says “whatever promises of God there are”. The Son of God comes in relation to those promises and God’s purpose. I suppose all that God purposed was in the mind of the Son of God in coming here to bring into effect—it was made possible to fulfil—the will of God. It had in mind even our blessing, of course, but then a result for God’s own pleasure. That is what the Son of God has in mind, God’s own pleasure, and He would have associates, such as ourselves, associates, with Himself, to have part in the praise and the worship of God and so eternally, but also secured now. So he goes on to say, “whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea,”—that is in the Son of God—“and in him the amen, for glory to God by us”. Think of having part in promoting what is for the pleasure and the “glory to God by us”!

Then he says, “Now he that establishes us with you in Christ” – the “us” would, no doubt, be Paul, Silvanus and Timotheus in verse 20 —but in verse 21 it is, “Now he that establishes us with you in Christ”. God firmly attaches us to Christ, “and has anointed us”. Anointing is not just for our blessing; anointing is in view of what is for God’s pleasure. God anoints what is pleasing to Him, and the anointing would be the fulfilling of whatever is done in view of God’s pleasure and God’s satisfaction. “Now he that establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God, who also has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts”. Sealed in view of God’s pleasure! Sealed, of course, in view of our salvation; sealed in view of our happiness; but more than that, sealed in view of God’s pleasure now and eternally “and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts”! The Spirit would give us the consciousness of our sins forgiven, justification, all these blessings that are for us I am not minimising, but I am trying to call attention to what the great objective is in the glad tidings, and that is what is for the pleasure and for the glory of God. Established, anointed: anointing is in view of operations down here that God is pleased with, that are for God’s pleasure, God’s glory. Any little service done, the anointing is available and it is for God’s pleasure. God has sealed us as His own property. Sealing on the one hand would give us a sense of security, of course. Again we have to refer to our blessing because it is all bound up together, our blessing, but then “sealed us” in view of His own satisfaction, and He can look upon believers as God’s own property and can say, ‘That belongs to me’, “the assembly of God which is in Corinth”, for instance, “God’s temple”, that is collective, but then individually we are sealed as divine property, divine ownership, “and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts”. That is what will be our eternal enjoyment, our eternal blessing. *Our* eternal blessing is enjoyed now by the Spirit and what is for the pleasure and glory of God we are enabled to fulfil by the Spirit, “given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts”.

Well, may the Lord encourage us on the one hand to be sure as to our foundation. Paul says “”unless indeed ye have believed in vain”. I do not think anybody here has “believed in vain”, but it is a possibility. Do not forget it is a possibility! Let us make sure of our foundation. We have received, received by means of conviction and repentance, in which we stand, of which we are firmly assured, by which we are saved. That is all for our salvation. It is so important. But then along with that and besides that there is such a thing as being secured and sealed and anointed in view of the pleasure and service of God. Think of God anointing persons and giving you the power and the dignity, the grace, to fulfil things according to His pleasure! I suppose it is the same anointing as was on the Lord Jesus. He could say, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luke 4: 18), the same kind of anointing on believers now that is for God’s pleasure, for God’s satisfaction. May the Lord encourage us, therefore, and help us all for His Name’s sake!

**EDINBURGH**

**19th June 1991**

*This preaching is first published here, not revised by Mr Renton*

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# PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH GOD

**Psalm 66: 16–20**

I was impressed with these verses, dear brethren, I wonder if we speak enough about our experience, how we have proved God, how we have proved the Lord. There is a very powerful testimony in telling our experience, even in the preaching. That would not be self-occupation, nor self-promotion, it would promote the One with whom we have some personal experience. Maybe to help younger people, older ones could speak more often about how they have proved the Lord; how the Lord has come in for them in difficult circumstances; how God has intervened in their life time.

It does not say here who the psalmist is, but it is ‘To the chief Musician’ as part of a contribution to the service of God. It is a song, a celebration, a psalm, a real experience. So the psalmist says, “Come, hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul”. Could we not all declare what God has done for our souls? The longer we live the more we prove what God can be to us; what a resource we have in our God as Father, in our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Have we not proved something, and can we not speak more about it? Can we not encourage one another more—“Come, hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul”. Paul was on this line, he goes over his experiences, for instance, in Acts 22, then Acts 26. I suppose one of the most powerful preachings that ever was preached was in Acts 26 when he described his own experience. He was in the midst of pomp, all the notable people were gathered, and he had them all embarrassed; they did not know what to say. Festus did not know what to say. Agrippa did not know what to say; the power of the word had everybody embarrassed because he was telling what God had done for his soul. Maybe this could enter more into our preachings. I remember a time when people used to be in the street at open air preachings, and they would give their testimony, young people told their experience, how they came to the Lord and what they found in the Lord. I think there is profit in that; we could speak more of what we have experienced for the encouragement of one another—“Come, hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul”. Let us be encouraged, dear brethren, how much God has done for each one of us in our souls; our bodies too, of course, but especially our souls— “what he hath done for my soul”.

It says, “I called unto him with my mouth”. That is prayer. Have we not experienced remarkable instances when our prayers were answered? Does that not help us in confidence in God? Would not older ones encourage younger ones by telling how God remarkably answered their prayers, so that young people might have confidence and engage more in prayer. Then he says, “Had I regarded iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not hear”. That would involve self-judgment, continual self-judgment, not to have iniquity in our hearts. He says, “Had I regarded iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not hear. But God hath heard”, that is he is a self-judged person who proved what God had done for his soul—“But God hath heard; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer”. Some of us are elderly and we certainly have had many experiences that would encourage others, especially younger people, as I said, and maybe testify to unbelievers, not only laying out the truth, but telling what we have proved, what we know by experience, and there is power in testimony by that means.

So it says, “But God hath heard; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor his loving kindness from me!” I just pass this on, I think there is some importance in it. That we could go over our own experience with ourselves for our own encouragement, and tell others what God has done for our souls. May the Lord help us!

**EDINBURGH**

**3rd September 1991**

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# JESUS ALONE

**John 12: 24 – 26**

I got the impression on Lord's day as to the Lord Jesus being alone. As a Man here He was alone because He was another kind of man, alone in that sense. We often say He was a Man of another order. How true that is! He came from heaven. He was not of Adam's fallen race. He was a different kind of man, and here He was alone. But then in Genesis 2 Jehovah Elohim said, “It is not good that Man should be alone” (v 18), but Jesus alone was not the full thought of divine purpose. Divine purpose planned that others should be like Him.

So we have here the grain of wheat, “Except the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, it abides alone”. It is by means of death, “but if it die, it bears much fruit”. This is death, not exactly in the suffering character of it; the suffering is not emphasised. The death of the grain of wheat is in view of other grains of the same kind, and so that is an aspect of the death of the Lord Jesus that it is productive. It produces others like Himself, and we as believers, dear brethren, have that character of belonging to His order, those whom He can call “my brethren”, His kindred. Wonderful thing which is of divine purpose! Then it goes on, the Lord says, “He that loves his life shall lose it, and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal”. Now this would be the moral character of that order. It is one thing to be assured of being of that order because of divine purpose and because of the death of the Lord Jesus, but then a moral character is meant to mark persons who are of His order, and that is, “he that hates is life in this world shall keep it”. “He that loves his life shall lose it”. If there is indulgence in ourselves, if we love our life in that sense, if we love self and indulge self, we shall lose it. “He that hates his life in this world”, that is, he does not indulge himself, he does not think of himself, he thinks about others. After all the Lord Jesus pleased not Himself. He became the means by which God's purpose was brought to pass and others like Him secured. Think of His going down into death, His sacrifice in that sense. Adam sustained that deep sleep in order that there should be a counterpart, His counterpart. It is the same idea. It is the Lord's death, not exactly the suffering side of it but in the going down attitude, “falling into the ground die” in order that there might be others like Himself and I would emphasise the moral character of His kindred, not loving our own life, not indulging in self. The Lord pleased not Himself, did not indulge Himself, but “he that hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal”. Then the Lord says, “If anyone serve me, let him follow me”. Well, follow Him! Follow Him in this attitude, follow Him in not pleasing ourselves. “If anyone serve me—what a privilege to serve Him, available to Him now—“let him follow me”; and where I am, there also shall be my servant”. Well, that will be true eventually, where the Lord is, His servant shall be. But then we are to be where He is now in any situation, in any circumstance, where He is, “there also shall be my servant”. That follows the moral character of His order, that is, not loving our own life, not indulging self, but following Him. And it says, “there also shall be my servant”. “And if anyone serve me, him shall the Father honour”. Think of how the Father honoured our Lord Jesus Christ. We sometimes sing,

… honours rare,

Are heaped upon His Son's blest brow

(Hymn 350)

and those who are of that order, and morally of that order, will share the Father's honour, “him shall the Father honour”.

Well, how attractive that is! We speak of brethren, kindred. According to John 20 the test is to be His kindred according to Matthew, Mark and Luke, that is, he that does the will of my Father who is in the heavens, (Matt 12: 50), he who hears the word of God and does it (Luke 11: 28). It is the moral character of that kindred which is so important and should mark each one of us.

May it be so! For His Name's sake.

**EDINBURGH**

**5th November 1991**

*This article is first published here, not revised by Mr Renton*

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# “SITTING, CLOTHED AND SENSIBLE”

**Luke 8: 35-39**

**Romans 12: 1-5**

**2 Timothy 1: 7-9**

**1 Timothy 3: 1-4**

J.R. It is suggested that we consider the word “sensible” in chapter 8 of Luke, and the same word in 2 Timothy 1, and “sober, discreet” in chapter 3. We have the extreme case of the demoniac found “sitting, clothed and sensible”. It has often been said that from verse 26 of this chapter 8 we have the man and the woman and the child, the “sensible” seems to be an important feature to mark each one of us. We begin with this man. He is not long in the way. He is just newly converted, shall we say, but he has these three qualities. “Sitting” would be an important feature; “clothed”, too, and then “sensible”. He desires to go with the Lord when He departed, but the Lord says, “Return to thine house”. That is, he was to fulfil responsibility in his own place; hence the need of this word “sensible”, that is, having a right judgment, “sober”, “of wise discretion”. The same word is translated in a different way in these four scriptures, but I think the importance of being sensible needs to lay hold of us.

J.S. Would being subdued—he was sitting at the feet of Jesus—be necessary if we are to have this character of being sensible?

J.R. I am sure that is right. That is what had happened to him. It says they went to see what had happened to him. What happened was they “came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus”. That is a very important attitude to have, no matter what comes in, whatever happens, to be able to sit “clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus”.

J.N.M. Clothing would be external and would be seen by everyone, perhaps something that God had done for the man, but “sensible” is his own state of mind.

J.R. Exactly. You wonder where these clothes came from. He wore no clothes, but here he is clothed. Where did he get them? It must have been clothing that the Lord could approve of. The first clothing was the coats of skin—was it not?—with which God clothed Adam. Adam and his wife were clothed in coats of skin so that Adam would not say to Eve, You are to blame, and Eve could not say to Adam, You were responsible. They were both clothed suitably. God Himself clothed them in coats of skin at the cost of the life of another.

J.N.M. I read that recently and was impressed by it. He did not just leave these coats at the roadside so that they would find them. He clothed them. They would fit beautifully.

J.R. They would be suitable to God Himself; and so this clothing would be suitable to the Lord. He is composed, he is of a right mind, he is sensible. This is the way to it as our brother is saying: “at the feet of Jesus”—“sitting, clothed and sensible”. He would qualify for taking responsibility locally. He is apparently alone. He is in the testimony alone as far as we know, but he could have been the gathering point for others.

J.N.M. Are the two priests in the Old Testament who offered strange fire a helpful contrast to this? There was fierce activity and so on, something has to be done, whereas this man is not in that at all.

J.R. That is right. He is perfectly composed. What a change took place with this man! We are all like him—tend to be restless. Our minds work, they rove to and fro, here and there, and wander, but this is the answer for everyone who desires to help locally. It is to be sitting.

A.McK. The reference in verse 36 is that he is healed. It seems there was something deeper that had to be attended to before he could arrive at this position.

J.R. Exactly. It says in Mark that “no one was able to subdue him” (chap 5: 4), but the Lord subdued Him; He came under the Lord’s authority. He would come into the kingdom in that sense.

A.McK. This would be the full working out of the gospel.

P.G. The Spirit would give you the ability to be suitably at the feet of Jesus.

J.R. He certainly would. We get that in 2 Timothy 1. What kind of spirit have we received? In Luke it is Jesus, and in Romans 12 it is God who “has dealt to each a measure of faith”, and in 2 Timothy it is the Spirit, the kind of spirit we have received. All this would contribute to being sensible, “of wise discretion”. It is important at the present time to have this feature of being sensible, “of wise discretion”, “sober, discreet”, of sound mind.

M.G.W. It would appear that the one and only thing this man wanted after this experience was to be with Jesus. He was not thinking about service or anything else like that, and then he gets under direction. Would you comment on that?

J.R. He was so satisfied, content to be sitting at the feet of Jesus. He was so happy in that setting that he wanted to be with Him wherever He went, but the Lord puts a man like this in the testimony and, according to Romans 12, in a locality, to work out things locally, to merge in the body with a measure of faith, a proportion of faith.

R.S.R. In chapter 10 it says of Mary, “having sat down at the feet of Jesus was listening to his word”, v 39. Do you think that the man would be ready for instruction and, being sensible, he would think rationally?

J.R. Surely he would. He gets his instruction: “Return to thine house and relate how great things God has done for thee”.

J.S. Would that be a great contrast to what had marked him before? It says, “did not abide in a house, but in the tombs”, v 27. Do you think the Lord would indicate to him that he was to take up responsibility in a sober way in regard to his own house first of all?

J.R. Exactly. What a change there would be in this man’s house! What a difference from what he had been before!—living in tombs, as you say, and here he is able to sit down and consider, weigh things over with a sound mind—with discretion, to use another expression.

D.McG. At one point Paul lost his spirit and said to the high priest, “God will smite thee, whited wall” (Acts 23: 3) but he immediately judged himself. But when he is standing before Festus and Agrippa and was attacked and called mad he says, “I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but utter words of truth and soberness”, Acts 26: 25.

J.R. Exactly: he was able to compose himself. We all tend to get agitated sometimes but we can return to this important setting. Maybe we do not sit enough. Maybe we do not contemplate enough, do not think enough, think at the feet of Jesus, instead of thinking our own thoughts. What a sobering, contented situation it is!

E.D.S. Is it a question of what influence we are under? It speaks of him as a “possessed man”. We will be under one influence or another, but under the influence of Jesus we are restful, sensible, in accord with the peace, longsuffering, and other things that marked Him.

J.R. “In his shadow have I rapture and sit down” (Song of Songs 2: 3), the shadow of the apple-tree. It is the influence of Jesus. The man is under the influence of Jesus here. He had been possessed by demons and now he is possessed by the Lord Jesus.

E.D.S. The Spirit would maintain us in that. It is interesting that in Luke they were to remain in the city till they were “clothed with power from on high”, chap 24: 49.

J.R. Quite so. They remained contentedly, happily.

N.J.H. There is a footnote to 2 Timothy 4: 5 that might bear that out: ‘sober clearness of mind resulting from exemption from false influences’.

J.R. It is the same word, I think, with different translations. Say what you have in mind.

N.J.H. It is false influence of which we have to be kept clear.

J.R. Exactly, and the only way to be clear of false influences is to come thoroughly under the influence of Jesus, “at the feet of Jesus”. Can we eliminate every other influence and sit “clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus”?

N.J.H. Is it also being clear of what intoxicates, what takes possession of the man?

J.R. Very good.

J.S. Would Paul have something of this in his mind after the conversion of the jailor? It says, “And they spoke to him the word of the Lord”, Acts 16: 32. He would be submissive to the Lord in that way.

J.R. The subduing word of the Lord; quite so.

P.G. “The feet of Jesus” would be His walk here.

J.R. Quite so. There never were feet like His, and this man was sitting there. Paul said he sat at the feet of Gamaliel. It is a question of learning, taking on the features of Jesus, by sitting at His feet. It is a subject, learning condition. So in Romans 12 we have how we can fit in in our localities with a measure of faith. It speaks in verse 3 about a “measure of faith” and in verse 6 about “the proportion of faith”. We all have a measure and we all have a proportion and we are meant to fit in together in the “one body in Christ”. The “one body in Christ” is a universal idea, but it works out locally: “to every one that is among you, not to have high thoughts above what he should think; but to think so as to be wise”. It is a balanced outlook so I can fit into my local meeting knowing my place in the body and leaving room for others having their place in the body. I have a measure of faith, others have a measure; so I “think so as to be wise”. Again it is the idea of being sensible. There is a note—‘So as to have a sober judgment, ‘to think soberly’, as ‘sensible’, Luke 8: 35’. It is thus each one of us as “sitting, clothed and sensible” can fit into the local company without clashing, without rivalry, just finding our place there.

J.S. Do you think that coming intelligently to present out bodies a living sacrifice has a bearing on this? It seems that, having learned how to yield ourselves to the subduing power of divine grace, we come to this point where we definitely commit our bodies a living sacrifice. The apostle is saying it is an intelligent service to do that.

J.R. Exactly. Really, I suppose, the man did that in a sense. As our brother said, instead of being possessed by demons he was possessed by the Lord and committed himself, his body being a sanctified vessel in view of the will of God.

R.S.R. Is it not a triumph for God that the whole man is secured? In Romans 3 all his members are awry—his mouth, his feet and his ways, and so on—but the man is secured for God.

J.R. Yes. In chapter 6 he yields his members, one by one. Yielding suggests the subduing grace and power of the Lord Jesus, but here he presents his body. That is the complete idea, as you say. ‘Presents’, as our brother says, is a kind of intelligent, priestly action.

R.S.R. Why is it “by the compassions of God”?

J.R. I suppose that is what preceded in this epistle. The compassions of God come out, His mercy for us, His provision for us.

R.S.R. Do you not think it would be that God is compassionate towards us and the best thing we can do is to yield ourselves *in toto* for the will and pleasure of God?

J.R. It is the influence, the result of the appreciation of God’s compassions. You mentioned the kind of state we were in in the early chapters of this book, but then the compassions of God come in and meet the whole situation.

P.B-n. Would it be the effect of sitting at the feet of Jesus?

J.R. I think so. What do you say about sitting at the feet of Jesus?

P.B-n. I have been thinking quite a bit of late about the restfulness and composure as under the influence of His love.

J.R. Exactly, that is just it. That was the man’s base, you might say. He set out from that. He is to go to his house and testify and so on, but his base is sitting at the feet of Jesus, sitting clothed and sensible, and here he is fitting in in his own locality “so as to be wise”, being sensible. He has a measure and others have a measure and it all fits in in proportion according to verse 6, “the proportion of faith”.

P.B-n. Is it not very touching—“a living sacrifice”? I think that would be the effect, that you present your body a living sacrifice.

J.R. He is like an offering priest. The offering priest offered a dead sacrifice, but this is offering a living sacrifice. That is, the rest of my life is to be sanctified in view of the will of God.

J.C.G. Being wise seems to be linked with the control of the mind: “to think so as to be wise”. Earlier it says, “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” in relation to getting away from worldly things—“be not conformed to this world”. Do you think the mind bears on what is “sensible”?

J.R. Exactly; the most important faculty a believer has is his mind, what he sets his mind on. Everything begins in the mind. All actions begin in the mind. Whether we move one way or another depends on the mind. We have in chapter 7, “I myself with the mind serve God’s law”, (v 25): that is the thinking faculty. The thinking faculty is in this direction: “I myself with the mind”. Here it is ‘‘the renewing of your mind”.

J.S. So when he says, “So then I myself with the mind serve God’s law”, do you think he has come to it that there is something in himself that will delight in God’s law? What a change that makes from my own will!

J.R. In fact he says so. He says, “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man”, chap 7: 22. He identifies the inward man, which is the work of God. He comes this way and then he presents his body a living sacrifice. He regards his body as a sanctified vessel in view of the will of God.

J.S. It is as coming to that point that we find out that God’s will is that I should have part in this “one body in Christ”, coming to know my own place in it, but also to respect the place of others in it.

J.R. Exactly. That is where “so as to be wise” comes in. That is, I realise I have a measure, but then I reckon others have measures too, and the fitting in of it makes for proportions. It is a measure each one has, but then the proportion in verse 6 makes for one whole; it is a proportion of the whole. The human body is perfectly proportioned.

A.McK. Satan got in initially through the mind and then through the man, but the way back is the same: God gets the mind, then He gets the man again.

J.R. Exactly. I am glad of what you say about the mind because it is a most important matter. All exhortations are answered first of all by the mind: minded to fulfil any exhortation.

A.McK. In Philippians Paul says, “let this mind be in you”, chap 2: 5.

J.R. That is the trend or bent of mind that was in Christ Jesus.

J.N.M. There are very great possibilities for the renewed mind. Our brother has just quoted Philippians 2, and also there is Paul’s word: “leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ”, 2 Cor 10: 5. I do not know what that scripture means to you, but I find it very difficult practically. Would you say anything about it?

J.R. Let us just read it: “overthrowing reasonings and every high thing that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God, and leading captive every thought into the obedience of the Christ”.

R.S.R. “One body in Christ” would preserve us from independency, would it not? It says, “and each one members of the other”.

J.R. That is right. That is true universally, but according to verse 3 it works out locally. It says, “For I say, through the grace which has been given to me, to every one that is among you, not to have high thoughts”—that is how it works out locally. We have the same thing in 1 Corinthians 12. It speaks about the human body, and Paul says, “Now ye are Christ’s body” (v 27)—that is the Corinthians—not ‘the body of Christ’, but of that character. So things work out locally. Do we not need this—“to think so as to be wise”? So in 2 Timothy we have the kind of spirit we have received: “For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, and that is very much needed, of course, at the present time. With the church in ruin publicly we find our way, the way of righteousness, in the midst of the ruin, so we need very much this “wise discretion”, ‘a quiet, sound or sober mind’, see note to v 7.

J.N.M. This is not exactly subjective. It is not a matter of our feelings which may go one way or another. Is it not important to be objective in our thoughts and feelings?

J.R. What do you mean by objective?

J.N.M. Well, when a matter is at stake it may happen that the brother that I like best is in the wrong: am I to be influenced by that? That is what I would call subjective. My feelings, my soul, lie towards him because he is a friend of mine. Objective means that I know what the truth is in spite of who is involved or my feelings. I cast myself in relation to the truth.

J.R. Very good. We were reading recently in 2 Samuel where Nathan puts objectively before David about the poor man’s lamb. Then he applies it to himself. I see what you mean. It would involve going by principles. We are to go by principle and not be governed by persons—a very important thing too. “Wise discretion” would involve that.

G.E.McC. Is that confirmed in Galatians where Paul asks, “who has bewitched you”, chap 3: 1? He brings in the antidote to that—faith in contrast to what had been brought in. There was a lack of principle because they were fulfilling the law instead of faith.

J.R. Exactly, “who has bewitched you?”: “Ye ran well; who has stopped you ...?”, chap 5: 7.

G.E.McC. The idea of “who”.

J.R. Quite so. What influence have we come under?—a very important question!

P.G. The present occasion would be an evidence of living relations with each other and with divine Persons.

J.R. Yes, you mean this meeting, this occasion? Surely, and we need to be anxious to preserve these conditions. The enemy would disrupt all this. The Lord delights in the brethren being together, happily and in unity, but the enemy sees it and he will do his best to disrupt it.

P.G. We enjoy a good deal together.

J.R. We do indeed, but the enemy is out to disrupt it, so let us be watchful. “Wise discretion” is very much needed at the present time,

D.S. “Wise discretion” would be moving in the spirit of Christ. Principles are right—they must be maintained—but we need to be maintained in the spirit of Christ to persuade all the brethren.

J.R. It is ‘a quiet, sound or sober mind’.

R.S.R. This would refer to manhood. “For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power”, that is—if I remember rightly—the ability to do things.

J.R. It is “of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”. There is a balance: “power ... love ... wise discretion”.

D.S. “We entreat for Christ, Be reconciled to God”, 2 Cor 5: 20. Your endeavour is to secure every man for Christ, every man for God. That is your objective.

J.R. Surely.

M.G.W. How do you read this? “For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice”—it is not ‘cowardice’ but “a spirit of cowardice”. Now, can we read on: “a spirit ... of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, not the thing itself, but a spirit of it?

J.R. It must involve the gift of the Holy Spirit, but what kind of spirit is He? He is not “a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, so we have the wherewithal in the Spirit. On the one hand at the feet of Jesus, “sitting, clothed and sensible”, on the other hand, accepting the measure of faith God has given me, the proportion of faith, and along with that we have this kind of spirit to help us in the day in which we are, a difficult day indeed, a day of public confusion, but He has given us this kind of spirit—“of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”.

M.G.W. That is very helpful.

J.R. It says in Romans 8, “a spirit of adoption”, small ‘s’: “For ye have not received a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye have received a spirit of adoption”, v 15.

J.S. Does it become in a way almost characteristic of the believer? God has given us these things. Does God look to us to weigh things over, as considering for Him, to look at things with a quiet, sober mind, and see how they are, not only in man’s sight, but in God’s sight?

J.R. That is most important, I am sure. Weighing over: again it is this idea of sitting, considering, weighing things up soberly, with a sober mind, “wise discretion”.

J.S. I get the impression that at the feet of Jesus that man would have been set free from every influence that would have governed him up to that point. He would be under the influence of Christ. It seems to me that if we can weigh things over in the presence of God, this is what is in mind in this.

J.R. The influence of Christ is always available to us. The fact is that we do not resort sufficiently to that influence. We tend to come under other influences and that often causes untold damage and loss of brethren. The influence of Jesus is always available to us at any moment if only we would sit at His feet.

D.A.S. I was thinking of Abigail. She prevented David from acting rashly. The result was that he saw something in her; he says, “blessed be thy discernment, and blessed be thou”, 1 Sam 25: 33. That should mark us not only as individuals but in our local meetings.

J.R. Exactly. Would David not have acted in haste? Would haste not have spoiled, caused untold damage, but she was of a sober mind, “wise discretion”, as you say, discernment, so much needed among us at the present time, balance, discernment.

P.B. I was thinking of the desire that the possessed man had to be with Jesus. Sometimes we would rather be there, but Jesus says, No, you go to your own locality. We need to maintain what is proper in our local position.

J.R. That is very good, but he was in his locality from the base of “sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus”. He would not depart from that influence. He would exert that influence in his own place.

P.B-n. We have a mention in Isaiah of “a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment”, chap 28: 6. Is that the same thought?

J.R. The same idea I am sure. That is what God can be to us if only we would sit in judgment. It is sitting in judgment, not acting hastily in judgment. I can see the importance of this sitting, soberly considering matters.

P.B-n. Paul says at one point, “but I think that I also have God’s Spirit” in a matter of judgment, 1 Cor 7: 40.

J.R. Quite so. Regarding this matter of a small ‘s’, I know that Mr Darby says in a note that it is difficult sometimes to know whether to put a capital ‘S’ or a small ‘s’ at ‘spirit’ because the Spirit personally so forms the state of the believer, see Rom 8: 9.

E.D.S. “But to think so as to be wise”: wisdom comes from above. That is where the Christ is; He is sitting there. It brings in the mind there too: “have your mind on the things that are above”, Col 3: 2. This is all available to us, to maintain us, it is “peaceful, gentle”, Jas 3: 17. Scripture often brings in wisdom: the poor wise man and the wise woman—Joab would have destroyed the city, but she went to the elders and the city was saved, see 2 Sam 20.

J.R. The Lord Jesus is “made to us wisdom”, 1 Cor 1: 30. He is available to us as wisdom, if only we would resort more to Him for wisdom instead of acting on our own, sometimes impulsively! The Lord is available, His influence is available, at all times. His wisdom is available for us if only we would take time like the man at the feet of Jesus “sitting, clothed and sensible”. We have to get back to that, it is so basic, so important.

J.S. That wise woman went to all the people in her wisdom. Do we need to take account of the whole locality in that sense?

J.R. She is so wise that she gets the ear of Joab. It would not be easy to get the ear of Joab, but Joab says, “I am listening”.

J.R.C. What is the bearing of what we are speaking about in relation to the ‘‘testimony of our Lord”?

J.R. It is not a “spirit of cowardice”—which, I suppose, was really a mild, gentle rebuke to Timothy who was overpowered by the ruin coming in—but this kind of spirit: “of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, which would cause us not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. There is the wherewithal to commit ourselves to the testimony of our Lord, and me His prisoner Paul says; that would be in the limited conditions in which we are. What would you say?

J.R.C. Sometimes we have to confess that that is the very opposite of how we feel ourselves. I was thinking of what was said about David, there was to have been no male left in the morning. That is how he thought it was going to work and he has to listen to the word of discretion. I was wondering if the testimony, therefore, proceeds in the spirit of Jesus.

J.R. Surely. Paul says, “Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony” because we have this kind of spirit. We have the wherewithal in the Spirit and to be governed by that kind of spirit ourselves.

J.R.C. Do you think if we are proceeding on that line that the Lord comes in in relation to justifying what is involved in the testimony?

J.R. Surely. We would have His mind. The man “sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus” would have His mind, would have that subdued condition.

J.Sp. It speaks about those “who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do”, 1 Chron 12: 32. Things had altered in this epistle. Do you think we have to take account of the conditions in which things are to be done?

J.R. Exactly, hence the need of “wise discretion”. Certainly power and love, but “wise discretion” is specially needed in the days in which we are, more so possibly than in the days of the pristine glory of the assembly before the breakdown came in. We need “wise discretion” all the more now in working out divine principles in a day of ruin. Is that in your mind?

J.Sp. Indeed. It was never intended that the assembly should be driven to the wall. I was thinking of what was said quoting from Isaiah about “the spirit of judgment”: does it not go on to say “for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate”?

J.R. Exactly. First of all it is to him: “to him that sitteth in judgment”, in a day when the individual is so important. A locality is no more than the personnel in it. It is a question of each one—that is chapter 2. It says, “Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity ... If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work”, vv 19, 21. It is an individual day in which we are. That needs to be emphasised.

R.S.R. It is a question of right influence, is it not? You are calling attention to “him that sitteth in judgment” (Isa 28: 6) and then to them, so that the “him”, the person, would be influential in a right way.

J.R. The “them” would be composed of individuals who each sit in judgment, persons like that. Each one has this ‘‘wise discretion” and sits in judgment and then there is a company. That is what a locality ought to be. Alas! it is not always so, but that is what a locality ought to be.

P.G. That would involve sisters as well as brothers.

J.R. It would. Do not forget the sisters. They are sometimes examples to us. They sit; they sit and listen. The brothers are responsible; they do all the speaking and may not always say what is right. The sisters sit and maybe consider more than the brothers do.

P.G. The brothers function in the public way, but the sisters are part of the soul of the company.

J.R. Exactly, a very important part, and sometimes it is good to listen to what the sisters have to say. That would be in private, of course. They would not speak publicly, but it is good to consult them sometimes.

E.D.S. Perhaps everyone might not understand what it means to “turn the battle to the gate”.

J.R. I suppose it has been applied like Matthew 18: “tell it to the assembly”, v 17.

E.D.S. The gate was the place of administration, and it was where principles were established.

J.R. Principles bring us to the gate, and then there is administration based on principles.

E.D.S. Would it identify the principle at stake?

J.R. Surely, but maybe they would be identified before. “But if thy brother sin against thee” (v 15); there must be something identified. “Tell it to the assembly” is really coming into another area, away from the conflict to another area.

E.D.S. The matter would be made clear so that we know what we are administrating in relation to.

J.R. Surely; that is important.

R.S.R. Does not to “turn the battle to the gate” suggest a right conclusion?

J.R. Yes, and the judgment that is passed would be definite and if it involved someone being withdrawn from, that person would know what he had to judge to be recovered. It would be a definite statement. It is not to be left vaguely. It is meant to be identified, as you say, and so if it sorrowfully involves somebody being withdrawn from, he or she knows what he or she has to judge. It is in view of recovery, or ought to be.

J.S. When that point is reached definitely does it not need to be respected? There is a kind of illustration of this in chapter 4 of Ruth when Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there. Then “he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit down here. And they sat down” (v 2); he goes over things and something is definitely arrived at.

J.R. Exactly. So Matthew 18 comes down to two, or three—“where two or three” (v 20), but what these “two or three” arrive at has the same authority, or ought to have, as the assembly had in the previous verse. “Tell it to the assembly”, and where the two or three arrive at a judgment, it has the same quality and the same authority, which is important to understand.

J.S. Was the Lord providing there for a “day of small things”? He says, “Again I say to you”. The Lord could look down the dispensation and see that the assembly in its outward glory and dignity could not be seen as at the beginning, but the same principles are to govern.

J.R. That is very important.

P.B-n. Referring again to the gate, does it not emphasise the importance of the local assembly, I mean God’s rights in a locality?

J.R. Yes, God’s rights in a locality. It is a broken day in which we are. “If two of you”: there may be only two persons who have the light of the assembly and desire to be governed by the principles of the assembly and desire to have the character of the assembly. That is the kind of day we are in. So I thought of this last scripture in 1 Timothy which refers to the qualifications for the overseer, and among these qualifications is “sober, discreet”. I am thinking of the importance of elders in a locality. It says in 1 Timothy 5: 17: “Let the elders who take the lead among the saints”. The elders are meant to function and to give a lead, not necessarily do the most speaking, but their leadership would be by example. It is most important that such persons should be sober and discreet, that such persons should have a sound mind, to influence the locality rightly. Many have been lost by leaders in a locality exerting a wrong influence. How important it is that overseers (and while overseers are not appointed at the present time, they are a necessary component of a local gathering) should display these features— “sensible”, “of wise discretion”, “sober, discreet”. They are not officially leaders. Leadership would be moral, but nevertheless it is a most important feature in localities that there should be right leadership of this quality.

A.McK. At the gate there was a well.

J.R. At Bethlehem there was.

A.McK. So that you would normally expect those who were administering to be marked by features of spirituality. The word to the Galatians is, “ye who are spiritual”, chap 6: 1.

J.R. That is right: of that character. I can see the importance of this feature coming through in overseers, that is persons who are meant to be looked up to. It says in 1 Timothy 5: “Let the elders who take the lead among the saints well be esteemed worthy of double honour, specially those labouring in word and teaching”. Elders are local; today they are not appointed. It is moral, but nevertheless there needs to be leadership of this quality in every locality—“sober, discreet”, of a sound mind, “sensible”—no doubt acquired through sitting at the feet of Jesus, that kind of quality coming through, exemplified by those who give a lead in localities. How many have been lost through wrong leadership in localities!

J.N.M. One of the tragedies we can look back on over the years is when localities have been lost.

J.R. Responsible persons were not characterised by this feature of sensibility, weighing things up, investigating on behalf of the brethren, able to give a lead, able to set out what the situation is in a clear way to carry the brethren. Would that be important?

J.N.M. There is a tremendous responsibility on such persons who have led saints astray in such a wholesale way.

J.S. Making careful enquiry or investigation is very important. There is an obligation upon persons who give a lead in localities to do that.

J.R. Exactly. Anyone may say it is none of our business, but it is really, and the Lord would hold certain persons responsible. There is an angel in each of the seven assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3. In one sense every one is responsible, but there are some more responsible than others.

P.B. It says, “how shall he take care of the assembly of God?”, v 5.

J.R. Quite so, so that is another qualification, “conducting his own house well, having his children in subjection with all gravity”. There could have been some breaking bread in the locality who did not have this quality: such did not qualify for eldership, did not qualify to be a leader or an elder, but I am thinking specially of “sober, discreet”, this feature of wisdom in those who give a lead, to carry the brethren rightly, to influence in a right direction.

J.S. Would one thing that comes into this be accuracy in statements that are made? You are to consider whether things are factual and accurate.

J.R. Quite so; and then, of course, the importance of standing by principles and naming the principles involved in any particular matter.

N.J.H. The apostle does not permit any watering down of things. It says, “The overseer then must be”, and as to those who minister: “And let these be first proved, then let them minister”, v 11. It is quite stringent.

J.R. It is stringent. It would be moral today. There is nothing official today, but nevertheless the feature of right leadership in every locality is very important, and right influence in a place. A leader might not necessarily say the most but he leads by example.

D.A.S. It says, “Let the elders who take the lead among the saints” (v 17)—among the saints.

J.R. Exactly, not ‘over the saints’. It is almost like in Peter’s epistle: “The elders which are among you I exhort ... shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising oversight, not by necessity, but willingly; not for base gain, but readily; not as lording it over your possessions but being models for the flock”, 1 Pet 5: 1-3: This is a most important feature for those who are older.

D.S. Overseers would lead to the feet of Jesus and you would find that you could not have features that were contrary to this overseership at the feet of Jesus, and also you could not move ahead of the Lord and you could not be behind Him.

J.R. That is right. The man in chapter 8 of Luke begins this way, and so would continue: “sitting, clothed and sensible, at the feet of Jesus”. That feature goes right through these scriptures, I think.

A.A.B. As to the reference in verse 21 of the fifth chapter, “that thou keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing by favour”, would the balanced mind we have been speaking of produce that kind of administration?

J.R. That is very important because these two features have to be judged with us: prejudice and preference. Persons come into a matter where often they ought not to come into it. Principles are to govern us.

J.N.M. I fully support what you are saying about those who are in the lead, but, in the assembly properly, it is not like in the established church where you have two or three who know what they are doing and the rest following they do not know what. One of the strong themes in the book of Proverbs, I understand, is that a young man might learn discretion. It is meant that this will go through the whole structure of the local company.

J.R. Quite so. We have had that, the man in Luke 8 and so on, but there is a special obligation on persons who give a lead, those who take on some responsibility, who have a measure of faith. A measure of faith may involve somebody taking some responsibility, maybe some feature of leadership or influence. I can see the importance of elder brethren or brethren who are looked up to being marked by this feature of discretion.

J.N.M. It is really a feature of the Lord’s love for the saints to provide such leaders.

J.R. Exactly.

J.S. Do we have to learn this? You do not wait until you are fifty or sixty and suddenly take this on. We have to come through the learning process and it is a good thing if we start to learn early.

J.R. Surely, we cannot start too early. The man started early enough in Luke 8 and it is open to anyone young to present his body a living sacrifice and have this spirit of “power, and of love, and of wise discretion”.

**DUNDEE**

**28th March 1992**

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# “O YE OF LITTLE FAITH”

**Matthew 6: 28-33; 8: 23-27; 14: 25-31; 16: 5-12**

The gospel of Matthew speaks often of faith, a very essential feature to mark believers. Faith believes and trusts. In Genesis 3 the serpent came in between Eve and God, so that she did not believe God and did not trust God—that brought in the distance. God had said something, and the serpent suggested that they should not believe and should not trust God, that God was not as good as He said He was. Faith recovers what is for God, because faith believes God and trusts God. God lost the confidence of mankind, but confidence is regained in persons who have faith. Hence the importance of this Christian quality of faith.

Four times in this gospel, the Lord says to the disciples that they have little faith. I suppose we would all have to confess that we are persons of little faith. Two persons in this gospel the Lord speaks of as having great faith—the Roman officer, the centurion, the Lord said of him, “Not even in Israel have I found so great faith” (Matt 8: 10), and the Canaanitish woman in chapter 15, “O woman, thy faith is great”, Matt 15: 22. They were Gentiles, but they had great faith, but the disciples, alas, had little faith. That may be a word for us. In chapter 9 we have two blind men who cry for mercy to have their sight. The scripture says, “Do ye believe that I am able to do this? They say to him, Yea, Lord. Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it unto you”, Matt 9: 28, 29. That is a principle, things happen to us according to our faith, showing the importance of this Christian feature of faith, “According to your faith, be it unto you”. The Lord said to the Canaanitish woman in chapter 15, “O woman, thy faith is great. Be it to thee as thou desirest”. The measure of our faith could be the measure in which we get help from God. What is the measure of our faith?

In this first scripture the Lord speaks about being careful, actually being too careful, being obsessed with tomorrow and what we are to eat, what we are to drink, what we are to put on. All these things have their place, but the Lord says, “But if God so clothe the herbage of the field, which is today, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, will he not much rather you, O ye of little faith?” It shows little faith when we are over concerned about these material things. It is testing and challenging, if you lose your job, if you are unemployed; if some calamity happens like that it is very easy to be obsessed with it, and to be over careful. The Lord says, “O ye of little faith”. I suppose that would mark all of us in some sense, being over careful. Paul writes in Philippians, “The Lord is near. Be careful about nothing” (Phil 4: 5, 6); that does not mean that we are careless; it means that we are not to be over caring or worrying. Certainly we are to meet righteousness, but Paul says, “Be careful about nothing”, do not let care obsess us, but “in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God”. That phrase “to God” means the person who requests is in the presence of God, he is near to God, let your requests be known in the presence of God “and the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus”. That is faith, committing our circumstances whatever they may be to God.

Little faith in this first scripture was because they were over careful about things. The Lord says, “your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things”. Our heavenly Father provides for us; let us have faith and dependence upon our heavenly Father. Think of the resources He has; infinite resources belong to our heavenly Father, and He knows and cares that we have need of these things. But the Lord says, “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you”. They were disciples, followers of the Lord Jesus, and He has to say, “O ye of little faith ... your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things”. Have faith in our heavenly Father. I know circumstances can be difficult and very trying, but let them bring us nearer to our heavenly Father; by faith be in His presence, make our requests known to Him. Faith would do that and would be strengthened. Difficulties confront us, dangers, sorrows and all these things, our heavenly Father knows all about these things, “your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things”. I know how we can be worried, over worried, but that is little faith. Let our faith be strengthened and know our heavenly Father. We see persons had faith in the Old Testament, although the word faith is only mentioned once in Habakkuk. Abraham, for instance, was called, and he went out not knowing where he was going; that was faith. He did not know where he was going, but he knew the God who called him. Let us know our heavenly Father who is able to provide for us. It does not mean to say we are careless, but not to be obsessed with care, because it would hinder our committal to the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

In Matthew 8 we have the incident on the lake; it is mentioned in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It says, “And he went on board ship and his disciples followed him; and behold, the water became very agitated on the sea, so that the ship was covered by the waves”. It says in Luke that there was a sudden squall (see Luke 8: 23); in Mark a violent gust of wind, see Mark 4: 37. These things happen sometimes, in the testimony; sudden squalls come in.

In the other incident in Matthew 14 it says that the wind was contrary; the wind is often contrary, but when believers row together they make progress. John tells us that they made progress of about twenty-five or thirty stadia (see John 6: 19), which is about three miles.

When believers row together there is progress, but what tests us is a sudden squall, a sudden gust of wind. It was alarming, because it says, “that the ship was covered by the waves”. Then it says, “but he slept”. The Lord had said previously, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven roosting-places; but the Son of man has not where he may lay his head”. He laid His head in this ship, He slept; He was restful in the midst of these conditions. It must have been very trying for the ship was covered by the waves, but He slept. The sea was agitated, and the disciples were even more agitated, and that is how we become when a sudden squall comes. It says, “he slept”; He did not interfere. It is like the Lord’s absence, and He leaves things to us, and sudden squalls happen. They say here, “Lord save—we perish”. I suppose the “we” would include the Lord Himself; I suppose they thought the Lord would perish with them in the ship. They wake Him up because they thought everything was going to come to disaster. The Lord says, “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?”. I know how difficult it is when circumstances arise in the testimony or otherwise; a sudden squall happens and we become agitated and all concerned, all worried. He says to them, “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” Fear is the obstacle here. The Lord was restful, He said, Why are ye fearful? Fear comes into our minds very often, it shows the element of little faith. He says, “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” Then, having arisen, He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. The Lord slept, was inactive and restful.

I have often wondered what these disciples ought to have done. Could they possibly have been as restful as the Lord was in these circumstances? The ship was covered by the waves; is it possible they could have been as restful as the Lord was? That is how the Lord would have us. If a sudden squall happens and difficulties come in, can we be restful, peaceful, quiet? In any case it says, “the disciples came and awoke him, saying, Lord save—we perish”. The Lord did intervene, and the Lord will intervene when a sudden squall comes, although He may not intervene immediately. But He will intervene. He will show what His mind is. It says, “Then, having arisen, he rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm”. Maybe that has not happened yet, but that will happen, the Lord will show, but meantime we are tested, our faith is tested as to whether we can be restful although the ship was filled with water. It was a very alarming situation, and we sometimes find ourselves in alarming situations. The Lord is restful. Can we be restful? “O ye of little faith”, the Lord says. I know how difficult it is but the Lord was restful. May He strengthen our faith!

In chapter 14 we have doubt. There is anxious care in chapter 6, and there is fear in chapter 8, and there is doubt in Matthew 14. The Lord said to Peter, “O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?” He did walk on the waters to go to Jesus, that was affection and faith too. Peter says, “Lord, if it be thou, command me to come to thee upon the waters”. The Lord said, “Come”. Peter, having descended from the ship, walked upon the waters to go to Jesus. But it says, “seeing the wind strong he was afraid”. He got his eye off the Lord, as we all tend to do. He became occupied with the wind, seeing the wind strong; he became occupied with the opposition instead of being occupied with the Lord; that is an evidence of little faith. I am saying all this that the Lord may strengthen our faith. Faith is always in something outside of ourselves; there is nothing in ourselves to have faith in; faith is in God, in the Lord Jesus, in the Holy Spirit, in the blood of Jesus; it is always in something outside of ourselves. Like the ship’s anchor which is put outside of the ship, to lay hold of rock, or something solid. There is doubt in Peter, but the Lord did stretch out His hand and caught hold of Peter. That was the Lord’s priestly activity. With Peter there was doubt, there was weakness; he meant to walk on the waters to go to Jesus, but he became occupied with the wind instead of having his eye on the Lord, and he sank, but the Lord in His priestly support stretched out His hand.

We can always count on the Lord’s priestly support and help in our weakness. The Lord does not exactly condemn him here, but He says, “O thou of little faith”, and because of the little faith the Lord strengthened him. He put forth His hand and got hold of him, so that he walked on the water supported by the Lord Jesus as Priest. Then He said, “O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?” The Lord would remove every doubt from our hearts and from our minds. Faith believes and trusts. The enemy got in at the beginning through sowing distrust in God, and that is what he will do at every opportunity; he will bring in concern about our circumstances, he will bring in fear to disturb us, he will bring in doubt to cause disturbance. Faith overcomes all these features, faith in the Person, in the Lord Jesus. He was in the ship in chapter 8 with the disciples, and if He was there they need not have had fear, but they feared, as we often do. Here there was doubt.

Now in chapter 16 the disciples had gone to the other side and they had forgotten to take bread. That did not matter very much. If they had been so committed to the Lord’s things that they had forgotten to take bread that would have been all right. It says, “they had forgotten to take bread. And Jesus said to them, See and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, Because we have taken no bread. And Jesus knowing it, said, Why reason ye among yourselves, O ye of little faith, because ye have taken no bread?” Then He goes over what they had experienced. He says, “Do ye not yet understand nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many hand-baskets ye took up?” You forgot to take bread, but do you not remember what happened when the five thousand were fed with five loaves and two small fishes? What we experience in our history whether individually or collectively is meant to strengthen our faith. Have we not had examples of how the Lord has come in for us individually? Have I not had examples of how the Lord has come in in my life? Have not you, dear brother or sister? Have we not experienced how the Lord has come in for us locally in various difficulties and in various matters? All these things are meant to strengthen our faith and to strengthen our confidence in the Lord’s ability to help us. He says, “Do ye not yet understand nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many hand-baskets ye took up? nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How do ye not understand that it was not concerning bread I said to you, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?” We often misunderstand, and do not gain sufficiently by how the Lord has come in for us on previous occasions. That is meant to strengthen our faith. They had little faith because they did not understand, did not remember, did not have their confidence increased in how the Lord had come in for them. Let us consider how the Lord has come in for us. In our individual lives, in our families, in our localities and universally, we see how the Lord has come in for His people; all that is meant to strengthen our confidence in the Lord Jesus and His ability to see us through.

So He says, “How do ye not understand that it was not concerning bread I said to you ...?” Then they comprehended that He did not speak of being beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. I think we could all say we have little faith, but the Lord would strengthen our faith. He has so acted that He ought to have gained our confidence far more than He has. Disturbances, difficulties come in and our faith is little, but may the Lord help us to appreciate Him. The fall came about because God lost the confidence of man. He has regained that confidence by the work of reconciliation, and He has regained the confidence of persons who have faith. May that confidence be strengthened, increasingly so; confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ, in our heavenly Father and in the work of the Spirit. This would lead to a certain confidence in one another, not implicitly, but a certain confidence in one another; the basis of fellowship is confidence in one another. May the Lord encourage us for His Name’s sake.

**DUNDEE**

**28th March 1992**

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# “THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED”

**John 13: 21-25; 18: 15-17; 19: 25-27; 20: 2-11; 21: 7, 20-23**

J.R. I suppose if there was one impression we had this morning it was of the Lord’s love. We never fail to get that impression at the Supper. I was just thinking, after the meeting this morning, of the significance of what the Lord said according to 1 Corinthians 11: 24: “This is my body, which is for you”. That loaf comes to each one of us. We are not sitting at a table, as I suppose the disciples did at other times, with a dish in the middle and all helping ourselves, but the loaf comes round to each one of us, and it is meant to give each one of us an impression of the Lord’s love for us, just as in chapter 13 the Lord washed the feet of each disciple. He brought the hand-basin round to each one and washed the feet of each one and each one would get His own impression of the Lord’s love for him. That fact apparently affected John in chapter 13. It is the first time that he speaks of himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. Jesus loved all the disciples, loved them with the same love, but John had the consciousness of His love. That is what the Supper is meant to convey to us, not only the general idea of the Lord’s love for us all, but the Lord’s particular love for each one of us, and that is what affected John. So he speaks of himself sometimes as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” but at other times as “the other disciple”. When he is not acting in the full consciousness of the Lord’s love he does not speak of himself in that way, but when he is, he calls himself the “disciple whom Jesus loved”, in the conscious enjoyment of it; and that is where we are meant to be. There is no power like it in the world. What is going to preserve us, dear brethren, is not our love for the Lord but the conscious sense of His love for us. Peter in his self-confidence at the end of this chapter 13 speaks of his love for the Lord; he failed in that, and we all fail in our love for the Lord, but what will preserve us is the conscious sense of the love of Jesus for each one of us, and to act and continue in the influence and sense of that love.

J.S. In the bread coming round we get a general sense of the Lord’s love, but as it comes to each of us do you think His voice might come to each one of us: “My body ... for you”?

J.R. Exactly, for each one; and then the sense of that love, and the influence of that love, puts us together in a fresh way. It is important to get that touch. Maybe we do not always get it—it can be a kind of routine—but the Lord intends that each one of us should get a sense of His own love, just as He washed the feet of each one of the disciples. It is the refreshing experience of the Lord’s personal love for each one of us. I can remember when I first had the consciousness of the Lord’s love for me. I have not always acted up to it but it made a difference to my life, and let each of us, young and old, get the impression of the Lord’s love for each one of us.

M.G.W. Would you say that someone who had this precious sense of the Lord’s love for them personally would have an enormous advantage? It is mentioned just after the Lord being troubled in spirit and at once it tells us that there was someone in the bosom of Jesus.

J.R. Exactly, one “whom Jesus loved”. It is as if John received this impression from the Lord when He washed his feet. When He washed John’s feet He was not washing Peter’s feet: He washed the feet of each one. Peter did not get the benefit of it immediately but John did, and he calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved, and he continued—not without ups and downs, like the rest of us—with that lasting impression of the Lord’s love for him personally. I mean something to the Lord; each one means something to Him.

M.G.W. So in a situation like this such a one would be restful.

J.R. Quite so. I wonder if John lying in the bosom of Jesus, leaning on His breast, would feel His heart beat. He was near enough to the Lord to get that impression. I remember reading in ministry that the heart of a man beats in heaven. To get the consciousness of that into our souls, into our lives, would preserve us and help us.

J.M.M. Does it give him a certain access to the Lord’s mind that apparently the others did not have?

J.R. Exactly. At the beginning of chapter 13 it says, “Jesus, knowing that his hour had come that he should depart out of this world to the Father”. How did John know what the Lord was thinking? Then it says, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands, and that he came out from God and was going to God”. John knew what was going through the Lord’s mind at this moment because he was near enough to Him.

J.M.M. And the others seemed to recognise that He had a unique access to the Lord.

J.R. The access was by means of his sense of the Lord’s love. He could not boast of his love for the Lord exactly, and none of us can, but we can certainly experience the Lord’s love for each one of us. We sing sometimes:

Thine is the love, Lord that draws us together

(Hymn 4)

—not exactly our love, but the sense of being loved by Him, proved in the emblems, for instance: “This is my body, which is for you”. It does not say ‘for you’ about the cup in 1 Corinthians 11. The cup has a wider bearing, but the loaf has its own special touch, it seems to me, to each one of us.

J.S. The loaf is specially connected with the personal love of Christ. Is that what you are saying?

J.R. Exactly. It says, “also the cup”, 1 Cor 11: 25. The cup is something additional. The blood is the basis for the whole universe of bliss, but “my body ... for you” is for the personnel of the assembly at the present moment. It is something special available to us, “my body ... for you”, being the believers at the present time and those of the nations, too, coming into 1 Corinthians 11.

J.S. But John does not name himself here. It says, “one of his disciples ... whom Jesus loved”. Why do you think he puts it that way?

J.R. I do not know, but it seems to me that he makes the setting available for us. I do not think the Lord loved John specially. I think He loved all the disciples, the same as He loves all believers, but John was in the conscious sense of it, and that is open to every one of us.

J.S. Do you think in one way it might indicate that John deliberately laid himself out for this?

J.R. I think so. He is found physically next to the Lord Jesus in this supper time. He happened to be the one who was lying physically next to the Lord Jesus as they lay at table. How he came to be there we do not know. Whether he desired it, or whether the Lord appointed it to him, we do not know, but on this occasion he had this very privileged position, and actually we can be as near to the Lord Jesus as we desire. His bosom is open to every one of us; His breast can be leaned on by any one of us. John was in the experience of it.

D.A.S. I am sure that is right. I was thinking of what was said as to the loaf. In Matthew the Lord says, “Take, eat”, chap 26: 26. It is not just a question of receiving it into our hands but of taking it into our affections, appropriating it.

J.R. Surely, and it is meant to have a lasting effect upon us, especially in the week ahead of us.

J.C.G. If John had the place of privilege beside the Lord in His bosom, did it mean that his affections were for the Lord all the time, including the testimony and what might have been more responsible? It was constant with John.

J.R. Yes, but it seems he was not always in the full enjoyment of it because he sometimes calls himself the other disciple. It is interesting that it is only when he acts according to the influence of that love that he calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. The Lord knows that we vary, we go up and down a bit, but let this have more effect upon us than it has in the past! Let us be more conscious of the Lord’s personal love for each one of us.

J.N.M. I would like to understand a bit more of the impact of the Lord’s body. He does not say, ‘This is my soul’ or ‘This is my spirit’. Could you help us on that?

J.R. I have thought a good deal about it: “This is my body, which is for you”, not even ‘which is given for you’. It is “for you”; it is something very precious that the Lord means to be for us—“my body”. I would like help on it myself. I would like to know what you would say about it. It is a very full idea: “This is my body, which is for you”, as if all the Lord is and all that is expressed in Him is for us. On the other hand His body was here for the will of God but it is “for you” which is an expression of His affection for each one of us. What do you say about it?

J.N.M. You would understand that this is still true. It is not just that He died on the cross for us. It is true now.

J.R. Exactly. All that the Lord is, all that is expressed in Him, is for each one of us to be in the conscious enjoyment of.

P.G. Our appreciation of that would be by the Spirit.

J.R. Exactly. That is very important, the Spirit would feed us with this love.

J.N.M. It strikes me that what you are saying is rather too much to take in.

J.R. We could never exhaust it. It is so full: “my body, which is for you”. Who could compass it?

G.B.G. It is the body of such a one. Would John not have been impressed by that, that such a one washed my feet, such a one loved me?

J.R. That is very important.

J.M.M. It attracts our heart to Him.

J.R. Exactly. “My body” is all that was expressed here in His manhood, and all that is expressed now in His manhood.

J.N.M. Who could define His soul or His spirit? But His body is, as you say, what is tangible. It is that which “our hands handled”, 1 John 1: 1. It is within our range.

J.R. I am sure it is. We will never exhaust it. There will always be more and more to appropriate: “my body, which is for you”.

J.N.M. I feel I need to be honest with yourself and amongst the brethren: I have felt for years woefully inadequate as to my appreciation of the love of Christ for me.

J.R. Yes, but even John did. I think when John writes this gospel, in certain incidents he would say, ‘I cannot say the disciple whom Jesus loved here; I have to say the other disciple’. He was not always up to the standard; he was not always up to the fulness of what he had experienced in the bosom of Jesus. It is just as we experience, but the Lord is very gracious with us, very priestly in His support of us.

M.G.W. Would it be, therefore, that John had in his soul a retreat, a kind of hiding place, a resting place? When the beloved brethren were troubled and all looking one at the other, he has this kind of retreat to retire into. Is there something of the atmosphere of that about it?

J.R. I am sure there is. He was in the secret of it, what was in the Lord’s mind.

M.G.W. I wish that I knew more about this.

J.R. We all do. I think it involves the Lord’s headship. It is a question of being near enough to know His mind, not only His command but His mind. It is the wisdom, the resource, that is there, available to be drawn upon, but John is near enough, is in the secret, the only one in the secret, in this section.

J.S. Is it of significance that he is spoken of as being in the Lord’s bosom before he actually leans on His breast?

J.R. It is “in”; it is ‘*en*’ (see note to v 23); it is more inward. ‘On’ is more support. But as “in the bosom of Jesus” he would be certainly conscious of His love.

J.S. I wondered if that might be the order in which we have to learn it, that we come to appreciate the Lord’s love and learn something that we can rely on, and when we need to rely on it we can lean on to sustain us.

J.R. I am sure that is right; and when problems arise there is the breast. The priest had the breastplate; all the tribes were on the breastplate. It was on Aaron’s heart, but Aaron’s heart was not great enough to carry that breastplate, but the heart of Jesus is.

J.S. Just to be simple, on the Lord’s day we have particular opportunity connected with the Supper—for example, of enjoying the Lord’s love just by itself. Maybe on Monday we have to go out and face things and need the support of His love. Would that be like the breast?

J.R. I am sure that is right. It is something that is constant. Paul says in Romans 8, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”, v 35. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, we may not always be in the enjoyment of it; but that love never varies. Nothing, no circumstance, can separate us from that love; it is constant, but we are not always in the constant enjoyment of it.

P.G. The Lord brings in manhood what is pleasurable to God.

J.R. That is right, after His own order. It is a wonderful thing to belong to that order of manhood!

J.S. What you have said about when John is not quite up to the mark is interesting. In chapter 18, where he refers to himself as ‘‘the other disciple”, he was in circumstances which were not altogether where he should have been.

J.R. Exactly, and he brought Peter in too. It seems that John was known to the high priest and was known to be a disciple. He did not require to be challenged. To Peter the porteress said, “Art thou also of the disciples of this man?” I suppose he calls himself “the other disciple” because he is not shining as he ought to have been as one whom Jesus loved. He was not acting in the consciousness of that love, and we can find ourselves, of course, in these circumstances too.

D.A.S. Maybe he used his influence to bring someone else into circumstances that he was not able for which would be a challenge to us.

J.R. That is right. John seemed to be able for it, but, as you say, he brought someone else into it who was not able for it, and so he calls himself “the other disciple”.

P.G. The Spirit has brought about this manhood that is after Christ and that applies to all the saints sisters as well as brothers.

J.R. Surely. He is called the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ—the Spirit of that Man. In 1 Corinthians 6 it says, “But he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit” (v 17) and the note is ‘The Spirit which is in the Lord himself dwells in us, and is the living power of the new life’. The Spirit which is in the Lord dwells in us so we have His Spirit—a tremendous advantage!

P.G. The Spirit has right as being a divine Person.

J.R. Quite so. In chapter 19 it says, “And by the cross of Jesus stood his mother, and the sister of his mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Jesus therefore, seeing his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved”. John is here fully up to corresponding to his consciousness of the Lord’s love. It is actually a remarkable scene around the cross. It is like a family gathering. Standing by the cross of Jesus stood His mother and these sisters and John. There is this little, you may say, family intimacy: “Woman, behold thy son ... Behold thy mother”. It is a scene around the cross of familiarity and liberty, apart from the suffering circumstances for the moment. That is by the cross of Jesus; that is the public situation.

J.S. So in chapter 18 John had been in the palace of the high priest and in chapter 19 he is standing by the cross accepting the public reproach of the cross. Do you think we will value the family setting among the brethren as we accept the reproach of Christ?

J.R. I am sure that is so. It is a remarkable scene here, these verses from 25 to 27. There are these three or four women and then the disciple whom Jesus loved and Jesus message to each one, an intimate family gathering for the moment.

A.W. As we are conscious of the Lord’s love it would promote movement. There would be more desire to be in His company. You see that in his running forward in the next section we read.

J.R. Exactly. It is able to bear the reproach of the cross of Jesus. What will sustain us in the reproach of the cross of Jesus is the conscious sense of the love of Jesus. The disciple whom Jesus loved was thus supported standing by the cross of Jesus.

M.G.W. What about that expression “standing by”—“and the disciple standing by, whom he loved”. What does that convey to your soul?

J.R. It is a kind of loyalty, standing by the cross of Jesus.

M.G.W. While we are called to activity and action and speaking, here was a situation which the Lord appreciated—that someone was standing by.

J.R. Really standing by inwardly, sympathetic in loyalty to Jesus personally and available to Him.

D.A.S. You never know when you might be called upon. Do you think he was a suitable vessel for this wonderful service that the Lord had for him to do—to look after His mother? I feel impressed with that, the affection the Lord had that His mother should be cared for in His absence. John was a suitable person.

J.R. He was the only man there, the only one available. The Lord had natural brothers, four of them at least, but He commits His mother to John because he was the only one available. It is good to be available for any situation.

D.A.S. You never know when the Lord may dispose of us if there is something He has in mind.

J.R. All those standing by would be, in that sense, available.

J.N.M. These Marys are the aristocracy of heaven. Each one has a personal experience, mostly known to us through the Scriptures, and John is presented last as one now able to take his place amongst these persons—a very high honour!

J.R. Other gospels say that they all forsook Him and fled, but here there is that little company, a very little company, but there they are, attached in responsive affection to the Lord’s love.

J.N.M. Basically is it not so throughout this gospel, the women make the grade, if I can use that expression; the men do not?

J.R. That comes out in chapter 20. John speaks about himself as “the other disciple, to whom Jesus was attached”. There was something good in what he did here in running to the tomb, running faster than Peter. That was something, I suppose—not very much actually—and he reached there first; but then it says, “and he saw and believed”. John saw and believed, but then he went to his own home. Of course, his home was a good home, Mary the mother of Jesus was there, but it says, “But Mary”. John, as it were, says ‘I did not do too well; I went to my own home: “but Mary ...”. I will hand you over to Mary, Listen to this! This is what Mary represents: “but Mary ...”.

J.N.M. That was true love.

J.R. It was true affection. She knew the love of Jesus and responded to it.

J.N.M. She was noted for her actions. It is good to sit back and join her.

J.R. The Lord was indispensable to her; she could not live without Him. Nothing in the world mattered. You could have offered Mary the best business proposition that ever arose; she would not be interested. The only thing that mattered was the Lord Jesus. This kind of affection is what we need, especially in our time.

J.S. As John wrote this he would see that this was someone who excelled.

J.R. Exactly. He would say, I did not do too well. In fact you wonder that John did not say to Mary, I have seen and believed. The disciples seem to think of themselves and their own home: “The disciples therefore went away again to their own home. But Mary stood at the tomb weeping without”. He says, I did not do too well, but I want to occupy you with Mary.

P.G. It is a very beautiful word that Jesus says to Mary: “go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father”, v 17.

J.R. Again she was the only one available to convey this message. The disciples might have been; John might have been, but he went away to his own home. Mary was the only one available to receive this most wonderful message.

P.G. “My Father and your Father”: that is a term of relationship. It is not just being forgiven; it is a relationship. We are brought into relation: He is “my Father and your Father”.

J.R. Exactly, an eternal relationship.

J.S. Would it all indicate that the Lord is looking for loyal persons to whom He can commit things? To John He commits His mother; to Mary He commits this wonderful message.

J.R. That is right. There may be few. Maybe there are few in our day who are available for such things. John, as you say, was the one to whom the Lord’s mother was committed; Mary was the one available here to receive this message. It may be there are only a few, but I would like to be among them. I am sure you would too.

J.S. What you are saying is indicating the way into it because each one personally has such a sense of the Lord’s love that they become trustworthy.

J.R. Exactly, and, therefore, at the Supper the love coming to each one ought to have that effect. If it has its full effect, that would be so.

J.C.G. Paul might have come into the same kind of thing as John enjoyed because he speaks about the cross to the Galatians: “I am crucified with Christ”, and then he says, “I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me”, chap 2: 20.

J.R. I am sure that is so: “who has loved me”. We often quote, ‘who loved me’, but it is not exactly that; it is, “who has loved me”. That is, His love was recent in his mind; it was present; it was not a historical matter. “Has loved me”: that is up to the present moment, the perfect tense.

M.G.W. We are told about the two disciples in verse 8: “Then entered in therefore the other disciple also who came first to the tomb, and he saw and believed”. I take it he had reached something, that he saw and believed, but are you saying that what we have with Mary is an advance on that?

J.R. He would be more intelligent than Mary, but the Lord imparted His message to Mary. The strength that Mary had was affection.

M.G.W. I find it very attractive. We get right mentally and think that believing is everything. I want to be more like Mary.

J.R. John writes, “But Mary”. He really says, ‘I did not do too well. I certainly went in and saw what I saw, but Mary saw two men’. She went in and saw two angels who must have appeared specially for her benefit, I suppose.

M.G.W. “As therefore she wept, she stooped down into the tomb”: that was a movement of affection, so she gets something special all to herself.

D.S. Does this feature represent something that is attractive to the Lord Himself? He says, “Woman”.

J.R. Exactly. Then He says, “Mary”. It is like the loaf coming to each one: “Mary”, the Lord’s interest in each one, especially persons like Mary. “He calls his own sheep by name”, John 10: 3.

J.N.M. Education in these conditions is rapid. Most of us find education a sorry business, but the teaching of John’s gospel—chapter 4 and then this chapter—is that education can be a very rapid matter.

J.R. That is right. It is a question of affection, not only the mind, but reaching the affections.

J.N.M. I wondered also about the expression in verse 2: “to whom Jesus was attached”.

J.R. That was quite good. Up to that point he was quite active and he heard this word that the stone was rolled away, so he went so far. But he does not go the full way. He was not exactly like Mary.

J.N.M. The word used, according to the note, implies something of lovableness. It is not the other word which implies the attitude of love. That is a point too.

J.R. It is. It is the word Peter used, “I am attached to thee”, in chapter 21. In the 21st chapter, in verse 2, in this independent expedition, he calls himself one of the sons of Zebedee. He is not up to the mark. He could not call himself the disciple whom Jesus loved in this diversion. We can all be diverted, but we can be recovered. He is recovered in verse 7: “That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved says to Peter, It is the Lord”. He is able to discern where the Lord is in that difficult situation.

J.N.M. It was still true in verse 2. The Lord’s love does not go up and down. It is not that when I am wrong He does not love me quite as much.

J.R. Exactly. It is not that, but he is not in the conscious sense of His love. First of all it is important to get the impression of the Lord’s personal love for each one of us, and to seek always to act in the conscious sense of it.

J.S. You mentioned in thanksgiving this morning that, along with being in the sense of the Lord’s love, there would be some impression of a body that was now fully for the will of God. Do you think that would come to us as to whether in our measure we can answer to the will of God?

J.R. I am sure. The loaf is meant to build up a constitution that would be here for the will of God in our measure, the same will as the Lord was here for.

J.S. I wondered if that might bear on our consciousness of the Lord’s love.

J.R. You mean maintained in the will of God.

J.S. As we are practically held in the will of God it would provide a basis for constant consciousness of the Lord’s love.

J.R. Was that not the Lord’s experience, devoted entirely to the will of God? He had a sense of the Father’s love: “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things to be in his hand”, John 3: 35. “On this account the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again”, John 10: 17. Was He not in the conscious sense of the Father’s love when He took the loaf? And we can be in the conscious sense of His love by appreciation of the loaf, and in our measure have the same will before us, the will of God.

J.M.M. I am reminded of the earlier reference in John where it says, “the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him”, chap 1: 18. I find it striking that it can be spoken in the same way of the Lord in the bosom of the Father as it was for John to be in the bosom of Jesus. I wondered if that supports what you have been saying. It was a position that the Lord knew. “Who is in the bosom of the Father” was something that was unbroken except, of course, when He was forsaken.

J.R. Very good. That refers to Him as man down here and as man as He is now. He came into that relationship as man—in the bosom of the Father, the setting from which He has declared Him. The declaration comes from that point of affection, “the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father”. The word is not ‘*en*’; it is ‘*eis*’. It is what He came into as man.

J.S. You mean that it implies that He moved into that position. It is not something you can take back into a past eternity.

J.R. We used to sing:

Son of God, Thy Father’s bosom

Ever was Thy dwelling-place.

We would not sing that now. It is what He came into as man.

P.G. Do you think the consciousness of these things is by the Spirit?

J.R. I am sure that all the consciousness and all the enjoyment is by the Spirit, even the conscious enjoyment of our sins forgiven is by the Spirit.

P.G. It is an amazing thing that you are brought into that kind of love by the Spirit. He makes us living.

J.R. Yes, it is life out of death. Ephesians regards us as “dead in your offences and sins”, chap 2: 1. The Lord came into death to bring in life. He Himself is in life out of death, and we have the same kind of life, life out of death, by the quickening power of God.

P.G. He has it by right as a divine Person; we have it by the Spirit.

J.R. That is it exactly.

M.G.W. Would it seem from verse 7 that the disciple whom Jesus loved was quick to identify the Lord coming into a situation, and then he is influential?

J.R. Exactly; “That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved says to Peter, It is the Lord”. The Lord was on the shore, but He gave commandment. He says, “Children, have ye anything to eat? They answered him, No. And he said to them, Cast the net at the right side of the ship and ye will find”, vv 5, 6. They did not know then who He was. He was a stranger, but then John says, “It is the Lord”. “That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved says to Peter, It is the Lord”. He must have had a sense of the love that was behind this standing on the shore and indicating what should be done, taking command and the result was great fishes.

J.S. Do you have something in mind as to the later verses you read?

J.R. Yes, again John speaks of himself: “Peter, turning round, sees the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also leaned at supper on his breast, and said, Lord”, as if John treasured that experience. He is fully in the good of it. Then this sense of the Lord’s love gave the Lord an advantage because He could call attention to John, and gave Peter an advantage because he could see someone who was as he ought to be.

J.S. Quite so, but he is following in the consciousness of being the disciple whom Jesus loved.

J.R. And in the maintained consciousness of leaning at supper on His breast. He has maintained this impression away back in chapter 13. He has maintained the enjoyment of it; and so we are meant to have certain impressions and retain them, or get back to them if we lose them.

J.N.M. You used the word experience. I think when we use it we have pretty largely in our minds wilderness experience, but you are suggesting there is a body of knowledge built up of formation by experiencing the Lord’s love at times of privilege. Is that what John is referring to here?

J.R. I am sure that is right. I am ashamed of myself often as to the little effect of the Supper. Each week ought to build up something in the way of depth of the appreciation of the Lord’s love and, therefore, an incentive in our lives. It ought to increase with us. We tend to get very formal, regard it as a very important meeting, but maybe that is all. What do you say?

J.N.M. Your word of faith last night is coming to me again. These experiences would be a lever in the soul so that, when we hit a rough patch, it is not that we get discouraged, but we can say, I know the Lord loves me still. It is kept fresh and new. It is every week.

J.R. The Lord’s supper is a tremendous occasion and maybe we do not fully appreciate what is available for us. It is the Lord’s provision for us.

J.N.M. Wisdom and love.

J.S. Peter says here, “What of this man?” The account would bring us back to what our own experience with the Lord is. There is no good looking round on somebody. The essential thing is our own experience with the Lord.

J.R. The Lord’s final word to Peter is, “Follow thou me”. That is intimate: Follow thou Me. John was already following, an example to Peter. The Lord says, Be like John, “Follow thou me”. John is one who continues. It is not that he should not die but just a suggestion that he continues, and so he did late into the apostolic day. He saw the ruin come in but he continues in this sense of the love of Jesus for him. It is this that would maintain us.

J.S. “The disciple whom Jesus loved”: I suppose it is open to each of us to put ourselves there. Do you think the Lord will find that in the scene when He comes?—“If I will that he abide until I come”.

J.R. I would like to be in that category, I am sure you would too, and I trust that all here desire to be in that category.

M.G.W. As to that expression, “Follow thou me”, I notice that, in our scripture in chapter 18, it says, “Now Simon Peter followed Jesus, and the other disciple”; but here it is “Follow thou me”. Has the heart that loves the Lord to keep the eye fixed on the Lord Himself, especially in view of the Supper?

J.R. And the effect of the Supper through the week too. “I became in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”, Rev 1: 10: that is what the Supper brings us into, another area, in the Spirit. We come together not exactly as husbands and wives, and fathers and mothers and families, but we come into another area:

Here nature’s voice is silenced,

And nature’s claims give way.

(Hymn 376)

M.G.W. I am glad you quote that because we sang that this morning where we broke bread. It was one of the many sweet impressions I had.

J.R. “Became in the Spirit”: the Supper helps us to do that.

G.B.G. Does John represent what is reliable, especially in this setting here? As was mentioned, it is like the Lord having the will of God in the heart. John was reliable, like the Lord Jesus.

J.R. Exactly. What will help me to be reliable is not exactly my love for Him but my conscious sense of the Lord’s love for me, because my love varies but His love never varies. The power, the influence of that love, is what is going to preserve me to continue and every one of us.

J.N.M. It leads to this definite, analytical discernment of the Lord’s voice: “And Jesus did not say to him, He does not die; but if I will”.

**DUNDEE**

**29th March 1992**

**Key to initials –**

*All Dundee unless otherwise shown*

G.B.Grant; P.Grant; J.C.Gray; J.N.Mather; J.M.M. J.M.Macfarlane;

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# HOW LUKE PRESENTS THE LORD JESUS

**Luke 5: 5-9, 17-25; 6: 6-10**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the great subject of the glad tidings. This evangelist, Luke, presents the Lord Jesus first of all as the One who has satisfied the heart of God; that is what we find in chapter 3. It says, “the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove upon him; and a voice came out of heaven, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I have found my delight”, Luke 3: 22. Is that not glad tidings, that God has found a Man in whom is His delight? Think of all the men who had gone before, all the history of the Old Testament, never was a man like this Man. He came from heaven, He was a Man of another kind, another order; in His Person He was God, “the Word was with God, and the Word was God”, John 1: 1. He was found here as a blessed Man, and it was a full answer to every desire of God for man. Is that not wonderful that God has found a Man in whom He has found His delight?

Then He had the work committed to Him of taking up the whole question of sin in which God had been dishonoured; and He honoured God and glorified God in the working out of the solution of the great question of good and evil. In this world there is a great problem, the problem of good and evil, and the Lord Jesus came here to solve that great problem of good and evil. His sufferings and His death have satisfied God as to that great problem. It still exists in this world; it will yet be worked out in the universe. It was worked out in the cross of Jesus; it is to be worked out in every man and woman who is to be blessed. The question of good and evil has to be solved, but the Lord Jesus has laid the basis for good to triumph and evil to be dealt with. It will be solved eventually; it is to be in every believer, but the great work of reconciliation has been accomplished, as we sang—

All His toil on earth completed,

All His work for sinners done.

(Hymn 404).

The One in whom God has found His delight took on that great transaction, and finished it to God’s eternal satisfaction. He suffered as if He had been a sinner; He took the sinner’s place, and laid the righteous basis for God to offer forgiveness to every repentant sinner. The work has been done, there is nothing of that work for the sinner to do, it has been completed. Is that not glad tidings? That God has found a Man in whom was His delight here, and who has completed the work committed to Him. The Lord said, “I have glorified thee on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it”, John 17: 4. He came into manhood to undertake that work. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and He has completed the work, laid the basis whereby sinners can be saved.

The next thing is in chapter 4. He overcame the devil. There has been a blessed Man here who has overcome Satan. That is another feature of Luke’s gospel, he presents One who has defeated Satan. Every other man and woman succumbed to Satan’s power—or Satan’s craft; there was one blessed Man here who overcame Satan. It says, “the devil, having completed every temptation, departed from him for a time”, Luke 4: 13. Satan departed a defeated foe; is that not glad tidings? The devil is a defeated foe and he knows it, he will not tell you that, but he knows he has been defeated; and the believer has the light of the fact that the devil has been defeated by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Next the Lord says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor; he has sent me to preach to captives deliverance, and to the blind sight, to send forth the crushed delivered, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord”, Luke 4: 18, 19. Another feature of Luke’s presentation of the glad tidings is that He is a Saviour available for every human being. When He was here He met every need, even physical need. He met every human need, and He will do that at the present time. He may relieve you in mercy, or He will give you grace to support what physical need you have, but His great objective is to meet every moral need, every need of the matter of good and evil, “to preach glad tidings to the poor ... to captives deliverance, and to the blind sight, to send forth the crushed delivered”. These are samples of the kind of need that the Lord Jesus as Saviour is able to meet. He is available for every moral need of every person, every sinner’s need; need of meeting guilt; need of meeting sinnership, the Lord is available. He has done the work; the work has been completed that satisfies God, that God can offer to every one forgiveness; that is God’s attitude, His present attitude to all because of the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is how the glad tidings come to us, by the Man who satisfied the heart of God. God had desires for man which were answered fully in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has finished the work given to Him; He has defeated the devil, and He is available for every moral need. That is what God is presenting in the glad tidings.

I want to show you how we come into it. It is one thing to hear the glad tidings presented and the glory of them, the majesty of them, the greatness of them, the fulness of them, but then, how do I come into all the blessing of deliverance, satisfaction, joy, forgiveness? How do I come into it? That is why I read these scriptures in chapter 5. We come into it by repentance, the way Simon came into it, “I am a sinful man, Lord”. He had the manifestation of the goodness of God; had the knowledge and appreciation of the goodness of God which leads to repentance. He said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord”. I wonder if you have reached this first step; I wonder if we have all owned before God that we are sinners and in need of a Saviour.

It is true of every one of us and we need to come in our soul history to facing the issue of good and evil. How is it met? It says, “But Simon Peter, seeing it, fell at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord”. On the one hand he said, “Depart from me”, that is, he felt the loathsomeness of his condition, his sinnership, his guilt before God, he felt all that keenly, but along with that he fell at Jesus’ knees, therefore he knew where the remedy was. The great subject of Paul’s preaching is “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ”, Acts 20: 21. We see both in Simon here, but especially repentance, “I am a sinful man, Lord”.

That is how we begin to come into the blessings God has for us, it is by means of repentance. I would just challenge every one here. Have you come to face the matter of your sinnership, owning your sins before God? The Saviour is available. We live in a wonderful day of grace, when God is forgiving repentant sinners. Because of the value of the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, God can afford, being holy and righteous as ever He was, to forgive repenting sinners, because of the glory and the worth that He has in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. I would urge every one here who has not yet faced that situation, own now your sinnership before God. It is the first step and the only way to come into the blessings that God has for us in the glad tidings. The glad tidings tell us the blessings God has for us, but then there is a way into them by experience, so that the blessings He has for us becomes ours, and the only way is repentance.

Then the next thing that is emphasised is faith. The Lord Jesus was teaching and it says there were “Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, who were come out of every village of Galilee and Judæa and out of Jerusalem; and the Lord’s power was there to heal them”. Think of the grace of the Lord Jesus. His power available to help and bless these Pharisees and doctors of the law, but apparently they were not interested. It is a great thing to first of all be interested. Think of being a sinner and not interested in forgiveness. O, what an awful state to be in! The Lord was there and His power available. Then they bring “upon a couch a man who was paralysed”, and they sought to bring him in and put him before Jesus. “And not finding what way to bring him in, on account of the crowd, going up on the housetop they let him down through the tiles”. This man must have realised that there was only one Man who could meet his need, and that was the Lord Jesus. He was helpless, he could not go himself, he had to have others to carry him. It says of Jesus, “seeing their faith”, that must have included the man who was paralysed. I can see them coming to this house and they could not get in because of the crowd. The man would say, I must get in somehow; I am so urgent about my need that I must get in somehow. So the four men opened the roof and let him in before Jesus, I have no doubt urged by the need of this man who was paralysed. There was faith with the men who carried him, but I can see him being really concerned about his need and that it be met. He would say, I must be brought before Jesus because He is the only One who can heal me. So it is now, He is the only Saviour, “for neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved”, Acts 4: 12.

So this man is let down before Jesus, and what is the word He says? The first word that Jesus says is, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee”. He does not say, What is your story, what is your guilt? How did you come to be paralysed? What have you done? It is God’s attitude, dear friend, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee”. Where there is faith, where there is repentance as well as faith, the first words are, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee”. God can afford, being holy and just as ever He was, to say to a repentant soul that has faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, “thy sins are forgiven thee”. Would you not like to be assured of your sins forgiven, be sure that that is a settled matter for time and eternity, never to rise in your life down here, and never to rise in the hereafter? “Thy sins are forgiven”. This is the wonderful day we are living in let us value it.

He is still lying on his couch, he is still paralysed, his sins are forgiven, but he is still lying on his couch. There were those that challenged what the Lord was saying, they say, “Who is able to forgive sins but God alone?” God was there in the Person of the Lord Jesus. “But Jesus, knowing their reasonings, answering said ... which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?” It was no easy matter for the Lord Jesus to be able to say; “thy sins are forgiven”. He had to bear these sins; He suffered for these sins, and for the sins of every believer, “who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree”, 1 Pet 2: 24. That only applies to believers; He bore the sins of believers. He bore the sins of this man. What an ordeal it was for the Lord Jesus to be made sin, to be made the very thing He hated most; to be made sin. We can hardly understand what it meant to the Lord Jesus, to undertake the great transaction that no other one could undertake. What a work! What a cost to Him! Value the cost to our Lord Jesus Christ that forgiveness is available to you.

He says, “which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?” Then the Lord said to the paralytic, “I say to thee, Arise, and take up thy little couch and go to thine house”. That was power; what a sinner needs is forgiveness on the one hand but also power, that is power to move, power to be here for the will of God, and that power lies in the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is one thing to have our sins forgiven, that is a very blessed matter indeed, but then we need power. This man has to go to his house, it says, “Arise, and take up thy little couch and go to thine house”. He had to take on responsibilities, and how can we do that except in the power of the Holy Spirit? We need power, and so the Holy Spirit is available to us as power. It is one thing to commit ourselves in the preaching; to face the matter of good and evil, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but we have also to go out on Monday morning and maintain our committal, and that is in the power of the Holy Spirit. When we are forgiven and desire to do the will of God it is then that we feel the need of a power outside of ourselves. We are not able in ourselves but the Holy Spirit is available in the glad tidings as power. The Lord has power on earth to forgive sins, and there is power in the believer to be committed to the will of God, and to fulfil that committal in the power of the Holy Spirit. So it says, “immediately standing up, before them”. You cannot prove to anyone that you are forgiven, it is a secret you have, you cannot prove it to anybody else; it is a matter of faith, we are justified by faith. When the world to come is set up, it will then be manifested that believers are forgiven and justified, but in the meantime it is a secret we have in our souls. When he rose up and departed to his house there was testimony; power was evidenced in a change with him; he was a different person in his house; not a victim of circumstances as he had been before, but now he is an overcomer in the power of the Holy Spirit. The way into the blessings that God has in the glad tidings is by way of repentance and by way of faith.

Then in the next incident, what is called attention to is obedience, another very important feature. If we are going to enjoy the blessings God has for us there has to be obedience. This man’s right hand was withered, and the Lord said to him first of all, “Get up, and stand in the midst”. That was a command which called for obedience, and this man was obedient. His hand was withered but he could get up and stand in the midst, and that was simply obedience, and that is a very important feature in the history of the believer, to maintain obedience, to come under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as this man does, he comes under the authority of the Lord Jesus. It says, “And having risen up he stood there”, he was obedient. The way to blessing, and to be maintained in the way of the will of God, the way of joy and satisfaction, is to be obedient. That is, we confess Jesus as Lord, own Him as our Lord and come under His dominion; in other words, come into the kingdom. The kingdom consists of obedient persons, who have submitted to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will yet be set up publicly, meantime it is in mystery, it consists of those who come under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ in obedience.

The first command is what he can do, what he has strength to do, but then the second command involves faith, because the Lord said to him, “Stretch out thy hand”. He might have said, But my hand is withered, but he got the power in obeying, the strength came in obeying. The first command was, “Get up, and stand in the midst”, which he could do, and he did, he was submissive under the Lord’s authority; the next word was, “Stretch out thy hand”, and the hand that was withered he stretched out. He received the power in obeying the command, and that is another very interesting feature the believer needs to understand. You might say, I have not faith for this, but then you always have faith to do what is right; you always have faith to come under the Lord’s command as this man here. He might have said, I cannot, it is withered; but he got the strength in obeying the word of the Lord, it is the obedience of faith.

That is all I have to say. There is abundant blessing available, righteously established in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The way into it, and the way to be maintained in it, is by repentance, by faith, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and by subjection to the authority of the Lord Jesus. That is how the great question of good and evil is settled in the believer’s soul. I remember an old brother in Edinburgh often told us, The kingdom exists for the solution of the question of good and evil. Come into the kingdom; come into the area of what is good where the judgment of good and evil prevails. May the Lord bless the word.

**DUNDEE**

**29th March 1992**

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# PERSONS TESTED BY THE ABSENCE OF CHRIST

**John 5: 8-16; 6: 16-21; 9: 10-12; 20: 11-16; 21: 1**

The gospel writer, John, follows very closely the movements and teaching of Jesus. It is a great subject of John’s gospel that he keeps the narrative very closely related to the Lord Himself. Other gospels mention other persons, but John keeps in the main to the movements and statements of the Lord Himself. But I have read of five instances where the narrative relates to certain persons, that is, the Lord leaves certain persons, and what comes out in these persons is what appreciation they have of the Lord Himself. And so with each one of us, we are all left to ourselves. The Lord is good to us. He has spoken to us these two days, but eventually He will leave us to work out whether we have an appreciation of Him or not. We are therefore left to prove ourselves. I do not intend to go into much detail or speak at length, but to touch on these five incidents.

The first is this man who was laid thirty-eight years with his infirmity, and the Lord offers to make him well, and does make him well. Jesus said to him, “Arise, take up thy couch and walk”, and immediately the man became well, and took up his couch and walked. He was a subject of relief, he was helped as to his infirmity, he derived some benefit from the Lord’s speaking here. Now he was tested because he took up his couch and walked and the Lord had left him. In a sense the Lord leaves us to prove ourselves; and He left this man, but he is a sample of one who was pleased with just getting benefit. Many in the gospels received benefit from the Lord. Take the five thousand who were fed; they ate and were satisfied and we hear no more about them, there was no moral work effected with them. It seems so with this man, there was no moral result. What the Lord looks for, and what the glad tidings have in view, is that there should be a moral result. It seems this man had more affinity with the Jews than he had with the Lord. It says, “The Jews therefore said to the healed man, It is sabbath, it is not permitted thee to take up thy couch”. Instead of being attached to the Lord personally he found his fellowship among the Jews. Therefore, you see, he was tested and found wanting. It may be he was only physically helped, and many in the gospels received physical help. In Luke’s gospel there were ten lepers cleansed but only one returned. The Lord says, “the nine, where are they?”, Luke 17: 17. They derived benefit from the Lord. Were they attached to Him? Had they appreciation of Him? Therefore we are challenged and tested as this man was here, and it would seem there was certainly not a deep work with him, he was content with having relief. I am just taking these incidents as they happen.

In chapter 6 the Lord went up into the mountain and the disciples went down to the sea and having gone on board ship went over the sea to Capernaum. John does not record that the Lord commanded them. Another gospel says that the Lord commanded them to go into the ship, but in any case the disciples were found, you might say, in the right place, in the ship. It says, “they went over the sea to Capernaum”. They were in the ship all with one objective, the same objective, rowing in the same direction and were making progress. Rowing involves the whole being, the arms, the feet, and so on; they were rowing in rhythm, and they rowed about twenty-five or thirty stadia, that is about three miles, or about five kilometres. So they are making progress and it seems the Lord was pleased with that. These are persons who are left to themselves and pull together in the same direction, rowing in rhythm, a very commendable company in this ship. We make no progress if we have different objectives, and obviously if we row in different directions. But here they are all agreeing together, each one committed, and the Lord came to them. There is no doubt He was pleased with them. While He was absent, here they were making progress towards one objective. I think we would all like to reach the same objective and we would all desire to row together for the Lord’s pleasure, that the Lord may join us, may come to us. They were first of all frightened when the Lord came. I suppose if the Lord came corporeally amongst us we would all be frightened, but the Lord comes to us nevertheless in a spiritual way to encourage us. It says, “They were willing therefore to receive him into the ship; and immediately the ship was at the land to which they went”. I just call attention to this beautiful feature of these disciples acting together. It is one of the objectives the Lord would have us reach, and ministry is meant to help us. Ministry and food they have in this chapter. They are meant to promote this feature of unity. There is nothing the enemy is more opposed to than brethren dwelling together in unity, or rowing together in unity. The enemy cannot do much about a believer who preaches the gospel and testifies individually, faithfully. He may discourage, but he can work havoc when it comes to what is collective. What he is most opposed to is a company expressing Christ, and if our object is Christ we will express Christ.

In John 9 we have this very attractive man who was born blind, and the works of God appear in him. It is not so much here in this chapter a question of our sins and the forgiveness of our sins—of course that is important in its own place—it is a matter of expressing the works of God. This man has a very simple but very definite impression of the Lord Jesus. You might say that he does not know very much. The neighbours said to him, “Where is he?” He says, “I do not know”. Certain things he does not know, but there is one thing he knows, that whereas he was blind, now he sees. There was something definite in his soul, it was “A man called Jesus”. How simple that is, “A man called Jesus made mud and anointed mine eyes, and said to me, Go to Siloam and wash”. He was sent and he obeyed and he came seeing. And then all these verses following the Lord is absent, and this man is tested; first of all with the neighbours in verse 8, then the Pharisees from verse 13, then the Jews from verse 18, and his parents in verse 20. He stands firm and resolute in his appreciation of the Lord Jesus, in appreciation of “A man called Jesus”. I trust “A man called Jesus” means something to every one here. It is amazing how the simplicity of appreciation of “A man called Jesus” enabled this man to stand against all the opposition. In fact he becomes an embarrassment to them. The Lord Himself was an embarrassment in chapter 8. They took up stones to stone Him. The Lord was rejected in chapter 8, and this man was rejected in chapter 9. They could not do anything with him. He really baffled them by the simplicity of his appreciation of Jesus. All they could do was to cast him out. He did not belong to their system, they could not fit him into their system. They could not fit the Lord in in chapter 8, they could not fit in this man in chapter 9. Let us be established, be true to our appreciation of “A man called Jesus”. You know ‘Jesus’ is not a title. The Lord has titles, but ‘Jesus’ is His name, His personal name. We are often tested as to our fidelity to Jesus. And this man was faithful against all the opposition, and the works of God were manifested in testimony.

So in chapter 20 we have the Lord risen, but He does not appear immediately. The Lord is somewhere around, and Peter and John and Mary are tested. They are quite active, they ran and one ran faster than the other, and John arrived at something in intelligence. It says at the end of verse 8, “he saw and believed”, but he went to his own home. Both Peter and John “went away again to their own home”, quite content with the intelligence they had. Then it says, “But Mary stood at the tomb weeping without”. We have with Mary not only appreciation but deep affection. No one could satisfy her but Jesus. He was absolutely indispensable to her. She remained at the tomb. The tomb was the last place that Mary knew the Lord to be, and in the devotion of her affection she remained by the tomb. I often think you could have offered Mary the best business proposition that ever was offered, she would not be interested; her interest was the Lord Jesus, nothing else in this world. We often speak about her. I wonder how many of us are like Mary? I am afraid not very many, maybe none of us. I think when John wrote this he would say, Why did I go home? Why did not I stay with Mary? Why did not I tell Mary I had come to something in intelligence? The disciples went away again to their own home. You think they might have said to Mary, You know, Mary, we have come to something. It all emphasises the devotion of the affection of Mary. Well, what can we say? Would we not all desire to have the devotion of Mary? The Lord had a great message to give, and Mary was the only one available to get the message. He could have given it to John or Peter, but they went away. Mary remained the only one available for this wonderful message, “go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God”. This is the excellence of a believer’s devotion of affection. You see it is a question of the Lord Jesus personally. All my failures, and there have been many, have been a failure in discipleship to Jesus. We can be as near to the Lord Jesus as we desire to be. May the Lord encourage us.

In chapter 21 John might have written, After these things the disciples went astray. He might have said, After these things there was a tremendous departure, there was a very sad failure; but he does not say that. He writes, “After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples”. They went off on an expedition independently. Most of us know what that means. Yet the Lord is absent. He leaves them to express themselves, and meets it all in grace. Has He not done that with us? There is not a word of rebuke. He fed them. He said, “Come and dine”, John 21: 12. He has something to take up with Peter but He takes it up very tenderly. It is the third manifestation, it says so in John 21: 14, “This is already the third time that Jesus had been manifested to His disciples”. So that John does not describe how wrong it was, exactly, although it was wrong of course. It became the occasion for the manifestation of the Lord Himself. Well it ends with the word, “Follow me”, in fact the last word to Peter is, “Follow thou me”. John was following. The Lord could call attention to John as one who was following. The Lord would no doubt say to every one of us here, “Follow thou me”. It comes down to each one individually, young or old, “Follow thou me”. It could not be more intimate, nor more appealing, “Follow thou me”. May the Lord help us.

**COLOGNE**

**2nd May 1992**

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# “WHILE YE ARE WITH HIM”

**2 Chronicles 15: 1-2**

**Mark 3: 13-14**

**John 12: 24-26**

I just thought, dear brethren, of this principle here set out in this first scripture. The prophet said, “Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: Jehovah is with you while ye are with him”. That seems to be a divine principle that is always true. It is easy to claim the Lord is with us but not so many claim that we are with the Lord, and that is the basis for the Lord being with us according to this scripture, “Jehovah is with you while ye are with him”, and that ought to be an exercise with us to be with Him, “And if ye seek him he will be found of you”; that is, He is always available to be with. I suppose it involves being in communion with Him, it involves knowing His mind, seeking His mind and having His mind. That is the basis of the Lord being with us, that we are with Him. That ought to be our constant exercise, I think, in our individual pathway to be with the Lord, to be near to Him, to have His view of things, to be with Him. Asa was successful in this combat with the Ethiopians. I think he had half a million men and they had a million men, and the prophet seems to drive this home. It is “while ye are with him”, that is, are we with Him today and not with Him tomorrow? I may have been with Him yesterday and not with Him today. It is, “Jehovah is with you while ye are with him”; therefore that ought to be a constant daily exercise with every one of us. If the Lord is going to be with us, we have to be with Him.

And so in the gospel of Mark we have this calling of the twelve. It says, “And he appointed twelve that they might be with him”, that is, if they are going to be of service, which they were of course, they had to be with Him to see how He did things, to learn from Him, to be in close contact with Him, “that they might be with him”. Matthew sets out more the Lord being with His people, God with us in Emmanuel, and in Matthew 18, the Lord with the two or three who are gathered together to His name; but Mark seems to set out this principle of which I am speaking that is, “that they might be with him”, and then that He might send them out. They were sent out as being with Him. The basis of power is being with Him in His company. We can be as much in His company as we desire. These disciples were with Him for, we understand, three and a half years. He went in and out among them. They were with Him. At the end of the gospel it says, “the Lord working with them” (Mark 16: 20), but the basis was that they were with Him. I just raise this exercise, my own exercise and lay it before the brethren here.

So in John 12 we have this often referred to, the grain of wheat which produces fruit after its own kind, like itself: “Except the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, it abides alone; but if it die, it bears much fruit”, it bears much fruit like itself, and that would be the idea of kindred with Christ, the idea of being of His brethren, of His order, and that is true of believers of His order, but then it says, “He that loves his life shall lose it, and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal”. That is the principle of discipleship, of really being with Him and taking character from Him. We know how He, shall we say, lost His life in one sense, gave up His life on our account, and those who are of the same order, have the same outlook, with Him in practical life of discipleship here. And the Lord says, “If any one serve me, let him follow me”. Well, how important that is, “let him follow me” that is, being with Him, “and where I am, there also shall be my servant”. It is as if to say, ‘Where my servant is, there will I be’, it is “where I am, there also shall be *my* servant”.

I just raise this exercise that the Lord is with us as we are with Him. May the Lord help us to fulfil it.

**EDINBURGH**

**9th June 1992**

*This article is first published here, lightly edited and not revised by*

*Mr Renton*

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# PERSONS WHOM THE LORD COMMENDS

**Luke 7: 44-48; 10: 38-42; 21: 1-4**

**Revelation 2: 12-17**

I would like to speak briefly about these persons whom the Lord commends. It would be right to desire to be among those whom the Lord approves, whom He can commend. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10: 18, “For not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends”. There are plenty of commendations of men at the present time, but what should concern us is whom the Lord commends, and we would desire to be among such, “whom the Lord commends”. And so this woman in Luke 7 had not been a long time on the road, like one just beginning on the Christian pathway, shall we say, a sinner, but she had an appreciation of the Lord Jesus. One of the Pharisees, who were self-righteous persons, invited the Lord into his house, and no doubt there was a cold atmosphere there and no appreciation of Him whatsoever. You wonder why he invited Him, but he did anyway. But all the warmth was brought in by this woman. This sinner in the city came into the house in all her need, in all her sins, and found One who was able to forgive her. You know, if I had written this incident I would have said that one of the Pharisees invited the Lord to a meal, but he did not do this, and did not do that, and did not do the next thing. But that is not what Luke writes. Luke writes what the woman did, and then, afterwards, what the Pharisee did not do. Luke expands on what the woman did. She had this alabaster box of myrrh, and she washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. He tells what she did. She had all the warmth, she was the one whom the Lord commended—a sinner. Here she was, she had her own appreciation of the Lord Jesus, of His feet that brought Him in grace to meet her need.

I wonder if we all have that appreciation of the feet of Jesus, the One who, “emptied himself, taking a bondman’s form, taking his place in the likeness of men; and having been found in figure as a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross”, Phil 2: 7, 8. As coming this way, treading His path in the cities and villages of this world, He was available to this woman in the Pharisee’s house. The woman came there and just poured out her appreciation of the Lord Jesus. The Lord commends her. She turned all her attention on the Lord Jesus and the Lord turns His attention to her, “turning to the woman he said to Simon”, the self-righteous Simon, the Pharisee, “Seest thou this woman?” What a commendation that was! He expands on what she did. He says, “I entered into thy house; thou gavest me not water on my feet, but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with her hair”. She was all in this—her eyes, her tears, her hair—she was wholly absorbed with the Person of the Lord Jesus and her appreciation of Him, and that is open to every one of us. If we have not come a long way in the pathway we can do it here now, pour out our appreciation of the feet of Jesus that brought Him in grace available to us as sinners and offering forgiveness and extending forgiveness. Not only did He say about her, “Her many sins are forgiven”, but He said to her, “Thy sins are forgiven”. He made her conscious of the fact that her sins were forgiven. For believers now that would no doubt involve the gift of the Holy Spirit because we enjoy and are conscious of our forgiveness by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Now in Luke 10 we have another woman who is commended. She is commended because she, “having sat down at the feet of Jesus was listening to his word”. I do not know about you, but I have great sympathy with Martha, because it was her house, and the Lord came in and His disciples and she immediately thought of service. What will I do to serve these persons? Most of us would be like Martha, I am sure we would. But here was one, Mary, who “having sat down at the feet of Jesus was listening to his word”. She was listening to the teaching. Apparently the Lord was known as ‘the Teacher’ in Bethany, because in John 11 when Martha had her conversation with the Lord Jesus, she said to Mary. “The teacher … calls thee”, John 11: 28. He was known in Bethany as ‘the Teacher’, and you know, dear brethren, there is a great need of teaching. There has been a lack of teaching. There is a great need of teaching, sitting down at the feet of Jesus and listening to His word. The Lord commends persons who are subject to divine teaching. There is a great need of teaching all over, and Mary chose that good part. The Lord commends her for choosing that good part. I do not think the Lord was rough with Martha. I think He would say, O Martha, Martha. He would not be hard on her. It was not sin on Martha’s part, she was doing her best according to her ideas, but He commends Mary, she “has chosen the good part”. I would just like to emphasise the importance, dear brethren, of divine teaching. The Lord’s commandments, are we interested to know what these are? We need divine teaching to know what His commandments are. Divine teaching is available to us but it needs subjection on our part, it needs interest on our part. Mary had that interest. Mary had chosen the good part and that was being subject to the Lord’s teaching.

Now in Luke 21 we have another woman, and she was remarkable. I have never met anyone like this woman. I do not know whether you have, but I have never met anyone like this woman. It was devotion with her and sacrifice. I have never met anyone who gave all she had or all he had. No doubt it took place at Pentecost; I am sure this woman’s action was fulfilled at Pentecost when no one counted what he had was his own, but they had all things common. That was wonderful devotion and wonderful sacrifice. We are not living in that kind of day. We are meant to be stewards of what we have, but this woman was wholeheartedly devoted. And you know, in her locality, things were not good. Things were not good in Jerusalem. The Lord had just said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk about in long robes, and who love salutations in the market-places, and first seats in the synagogues, and first places at suppers; who devour the houses of widows, and as a pretext make long prayers”, Luke 20: 46, 47. That was Jerusalem, that was the locality where this woman was. What was the answer? Did she complain? She gave all she had in devotion and sacrifice. What happened? The whole thing had to come down because of this woman. Before the Lord speaks about the temple and the buildings coming down, He had what He was looking for in this woman, it was devotion and complete sacrifice. I think few of us are like this woman, but the Lord commends her, “Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow has cast in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have cast into the gifts of God; but she out of her need has cast in all the living which she had”. How remarkable that is! No wonder she had the Lord’s commendation, for she cast in all the living which she had. Have you met a person like that? Are we in any measure devoted, prepared to sacrifice, committed to the Lord’s interests down here? If so, we will have the Lord’s commendation—“For not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends”, 2 Cor 10: 18.

Now in Revelation, to the angel of the assembly, representing a responsible person or persons, in Pergamos, the Lord addresses Himself, saying, “These things says he that has the sharp two-edged sword: I know where thou dwellest, where the throne of Satan is ...”. Although there had been a faithful witness there, Antipas, things had declined. There began to be mixture, there began to be worldly features in Pergamos. There began to be a popular kind of religion in Pergamos. No doubt it refers to the time of Constantine when Christianity became popular, and principles were sacrificed. The principle of separation was given up. There had been a time of persecution as in Smyrna, but in Pergamos it was the worldly element taking control, and that is a danger with every one of us. So the Lord calls attention to two doctrines; one was the doctrine of Balaam, and the other one was the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. It tells us about the doctrine of Balaam, it says, “I have ... against thee that thou hast there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel”. There has been a great snare of wrong teaching. We referred to it in the reading, the open principle, “to eat of idol sacrifices and commit fornication”, lack of devotion, lack of separation, and an open outlook. What a snare that has been right down since 1848, the open element, the desire for more liberty for our own wills and all these worldly influences coming in. What a snare that has been among the people of God. There was a conflict then, and there were sentimentalists who were lost in that conflict, and the enemy has attempted over and over again to bring in that kind of teaching. It sounds so plausible, it sounds so acceptable, the liberty for human thinking, because of the lack of principle. We speak of the open principle but really it is a lack of principle, and that is the doctrine of Balaam. Then there is the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. Well, I am not very clear what that was, but we said in the reading that the two attacks of the enemy have been the open principle and interference in our localities. It has been a plague all down through the history, over and over again. It would seem the enemy does not have many tactics, but he seems to be successful in the same old thing again and again. It seems so many are lost and caught up in these doctrines. You see it speaks of the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes.

Well, I want to speak about the overcomer. This is the kind of day we are in. At the end of Mr Darby’s life he was greatly concerned about the coming in of worldliness. There was an issue in 1879, the Ryde and Ramsgate matter. There was no issue of the truth, it was just a low state among the brethren, and he was concerned about worldliness. He saw things coming in.

I wonder what he would think now. In any case there is a word to the overcomer, “To him that overcomes, to him will I give of the hidden manna”. Oh, it is worthwhile overcoming in this worldly environment, dear brethren, to be given of the hidden manna. It is what God delights in in the manhood of Jesus, the hidden manna. Does not Mr Darby’s hymn say—

There on the hidden bread

Of Christ, once humbled here—

God’s treasured store—for ever fed,

His love my soul shall cheer.

(Hymn 79)

Think of the overcomer having the hidden manna, God’s appreciation of the manhood of Jesus. What a feast for our souls! That is available to the overcomer in this worldly conflict, “to him will I give of the hidden manna”. There is a great deal to say about that, if I could, the hidden manna; I think it is God’s delight in the manhood of Jesus, expressed here and where He is now. It refers to the pot of manna that was put in the ark, I suppose, but it is hidden, it is a secret matter. And then it says, “I will give to him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it”. And Mr Darby says about that—

Called by that secret name

Of undisclosed delight

(Blest answer to reproach and shame)

Graved on the stone of white.

I understand that white stone is a little pebble. It is a very small thing. It is nothing public, but it is just a little sense of the Lord’s commendation and the Lord’s approval to the overcomer in this worldly kind of atmosphere. It is a little thing that the overcomer can appreciate. It is for himself. You cannot boast about it; you cannot tell others about it; it is not a thing you can display or parade before others, it is not public. There is no company of believers which has the Lord’s public acclamation, public approval. There is no company on the earth which has the Lord’s public approval. What we look for is just a little sense of the Lord’s approval, the Lord’s commendation. That is the little stone. It says, “I will give to him a white stone”, it is a little pebble, “and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it”. There is no public approval. I want to emphasise that. It is not public, you cannot prove it to anybody else, but it is just a secret in the soul of the overcomer. It belongs to him, he keeps it to himself, but oh how he values it, a sense of the Lord’s commendation, the Lord’s approval. How we need to overcome, dear brethren, and have this secret name of undisclosed delight, a secret sense of the Lord’s approval. It may be that others do not approve. It may be even some brethren do not approve. But what we can go on with happily and restfully is a little sense of the Lord’s approval.

I would commend that to every one of us, because we are living in difficult times, but I think the Lord would comfort us. Has our time together not been some compensation? Has there not been an atmosphere of the Lord’s presence and the Lord’s help? Has there not been that? I think there has been. I cannot help thinking of our dear brother who goes alone soon to Brisbane, and another brother who goes alone to Armidale, another brother who goes alone to Perth, deprived of practical fellowship. You need to go with a sense of this white stone and on it the name written which no one knows but he that receives it. It is something by way of compensation, something that is going to support us and sustain us even if we are alone and deprived of practical fellowship. What days we are in, how difficult they are! But, O, how precious to have just a little indication that the Lord is approving of us where we are. There are other places where we are very few, just two or three. Well, here we are, “I will give to him”, an individual, “a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows but he that receives it”. You cannot boast of it. If we had something public maybe we would glory in it, maybe we would have some pride in it, but it is just this secret thing that is so precious and so valuable, even if others, even if brethren do not approve. Well if the Lord does, is that not all that matters? Does anything else matter at the moment, if the Lord approves? Can we not delight in that, just treasure it? May the Lord encourage us, for His Name’s sake.

**SYDNEY**

**10th October 1992**

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# THE LORD JESUS CALLING PERSONS

**Mark 1: 4-8, 14-20**

**Matthew 18: 1-4**

**Luke 13: 10-13**

I have a desire to speak about the Lord calling persons. That is the Lord’s attitude today—He is calling persons. Many persons called upon the Lord and He answered every one. He never turned any away—any exercise, any need, the Lord Jesus answered every one—“whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”, Acts 2: 21. The Lord is available for every one who calls upon Him. That is one side of the glad tidings, a very important side. Now I want to speak about the Lord Himself calling, and He is calling here today. He has a call for every one; He has something in mind for every one of us. It is a very wonderful thing that we live in a day when the Lord is calling us; it will not be always so. A gospel preaching is a very happy occasion, yet a very solemn and very serious one. It is an occasion when we have the word of God before us; it is not an ordinary occasion; it is an occasion when God makes His presence known by His word. I speak first of all about these four men whom the Lord called, that is Simon and Andrew and James and John. We learn from the first chapter of John’s gospel that, if not all, at least Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. That is why I read what John preached. John preached the baptism of repentance for remission of sins. That looked forward to the righteous basis for sins being remitted which was the work accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ, it could only be on the basis of that righteous transaction on the cross. We sang—

On the cross He once has suffered,

There by Him the work was done.

(Hymn 154)

That is the basis on which God can righteously remit the sins of repentant sinners. John preached it here, and Andrew was a sample of a disciple of John, that is, he had obeyed his glad tidings, had repented, and therefore was in the light of remission of sins. It says, “the baptism of repentance for remission of sins”. Repentance is a very deep work, not a superficial thing, it is not only an act of mind; we repent from the heart. Repentance means that we come to the same judgment of ourselves as God has, and God has shown His judgment of us in the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is how seriously God views sins. His own beloved Son has suffered on the cross, suffered three hours of darkness, suffered the forsaking; He undertook a work that no other could undertake. Only He was qualified to do it for only He was the sinless One but He suffered as if He had been the sinner. He took the sinner’s place. Think of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that He undertook this work at infinite cost to Himself. Scripture tells us He was made sin. What that means we cannot really fathom, but He was made the thing that He righteously hated. What an awful thing it was for the Lord Jesus to be made sin. He took the sinner’s place. He suffered as if He had been the sinner, in the sinner’s stead, so that there might be a righteous basis for God to forgive, to remit, the sins of those who repent. That work is so great that God, being as righteous and holy as ever He was, can forgive repentant sinners. It is a tribute to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. He suffered the three hours of forsaking, He sustained the penalty of death, He poured out His precious blood. He was buried in our stead. Instead of the sinner being put out of God’s sight, the Lord Jesus was buried three days and three nights in the heart of the earth to be the end of that order of man that sinned.

Think of all that the Lord undertook and completed for God’s satisfaction; so much so that God was so pleased with that work that He raised Him from the dead and highly exalted Him; the highest office in the universe is occupied by our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the position, so that righteously there is remission of sins based on the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, but based on repentance on the part of the sinner. The sinner owns his sinnership; he calls for mercy which is readily available because the work has been finished; there is nothing left of that work to do, that work is completed. What is called for on our part is repentance, so that we may come into the full result of what that finished work has in view in blessings that God has for us. It says here, “remission of sins”, it is not only God’s attitude of forgiveness, but it is remission, that is, there is a transaction that is complete, so that our sins will never rise again in our life down here and will never rise hereafter. That is the remission of sins on the basis of repentance, the Lord calls for repentance.

Then he goes on to say, “and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins”—confessing their sinnership. The woman in John 4 said, “Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done”, John 4: 29. Her whole history was settled once and for all, not only for her satisfaction but for God’s satisfaction. It goes on to speak about the gift of the Holy Spirit, “I indeed have baptised you with water, but he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit”. The gospel presented in these few verses that John preached anticipated the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are two blessings available in the glad tidings to repentant sinners. I hope all here have repented and know their sins remitted. If not, that blessing can be yours today. If there is one here who is not assured of the remission of sins, do not hesitate, be exercised, be concerned, have that transaction this very day, and have it settled once and for all.

Now it is such persons the Lord calls here. He called these two, Simon and Andrew. He says, “Come after me”. He is calling them to be disciples. He calls believers today, believers who are real, who know their sins forgiven, He is calling them to be disciples, He is calling for committal to Him; for submission to Him as Lord and Master, and submission to His teaching; He is calling persons to be disciples, “Come after me”. He says, “and I will make you”. If we commit ourselves as disciples the Lord will make something of us for His own pleasure, for His service, for the promotion of His kingdom; He made something of these persons. He tells these first two what He would make them. He says, “and I will make you become fishers of men”, and so He did. Then He called these other two, it says, “and straightway he called them”. He did not say what He would make of them, but He made something of them because they committed themselves as disciples.

I would like to appeal to every one here, to answer the call that the Lord makes now. Having your sins settled you should become one of the disciples of Jesus, be available for Him for His purpose, to learn from Him and follow Him. Have Him before you as your ideal, that is what the disciples did, they followed Him wherever He went and listened to His instruction. Then in the absence of the Lord these four disciples cared for His interests, and represented the Lord in the time of His absence. The call is, “Come after me”. He called them to become disciples of His. I would appeal to every one here. First of all these two great blessings are available this very day, the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Lord is calling those who have received these blessings, “Come after me”, He says. He calls us to follow; He calls us to be His disciples, and He will make something of us. The disciples often failed, they often said the wrong thing; read the gospels and you will find that, but the Lord was very patient. In fact, Peter denied Jesus three times, but did the Lord give him up? No, the Lord made something of him. Even a disciple denied Him three times, you might say a hopeless case. No, he had committed himself as a disciple and the Lord saw him through. You could never commit yourself to a more blessed Master than the Lord Jesus. The Lord became a Master to these disciples. I think the idea of Master is individual, Jesus, Master. Is He your Master? Are you under His authority? Are you here for Him, and for His pleasure, and for the will of God? That is the call, friend, that is the call to you. It is a call to be a disciple of Jesus.

The next we read of is in Matthew 18. It says very attractively, “And Jesus having called a little child to him”. We have had three days of meetings, and it might appear the little ones have been neglected. We have been speaking about the wonderful reality of abiding in God’s love which is not beyond the little ones. It says here, “Jesus having called a little child”. He would call little children. I would appeal to the little ones here, Jesus is interested in you. The brethren are interested in you, and it may appear in our readings that it was not so; we do not have Sunday schools, the truth is for all, young and old. When I was young I did not understand all that was being said, but I felt there was something worthwhile going in for. I think that is what young people ought to feel. If the older brethren speak about abiding in love and abiding in God, it is a very blessed thing, something worth going in for. The Lord is calling—the Lord called a little child, and He would call every little child here today. He called this little child, not only for the blessing of the little child, but for the older ones to learn from that little child. The Lord was pleased with the simplicity and the reality of that little child. It was not an ordinary little child, the Lord says, “this little child”. It says, “Jesus having called a little child to him, set it in their midst”. He says, “Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child”—“this little child”—would you, dear young child, be a child that the Lord would call and you would simply answer the call of Jesus? ‘Come!—’tis Jesus gently calling’, the hymn says. He gently called this little child and this little child answered. May every little child be like that here today. The disciples were saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of the heavens?” That is far removed from a little child’s spirit. Believers need to maintain, as long as we are here, the little child attitude, the simple reality of the little child. In the world to come it says that a little child shall lead them”, Isa 11: 6. The Lord set the little child in the midst of the disciples as an example to them. May we be kept in the simplicity and reality of a little child. When we grow to manhood we become complicated, but a little child is simple and real, just itself, just as we ought to be. Jesus called a little child to Him, and the child responded. May every one such here today do so too.

Now in the gospel of Luke the Lord called this woman. She was a believer, she was a child of Abraham. Think of the potential of being a child of Abraham, but it says, “there was a woman having a spirit of infirmity eighteen years”. It is not called an unclean spirit, it is a spirit of infirmity, some weakness, and Satan bound her. She had this spirit of infirmity eighteen years, “and she was bent together and wholly unable to lift her head up”. Dear believer, we can all get into that state. If Satan had his way with us he would have us all bound down and not able to lift our heads up; in depression or some such thing he would have us bound. He is a very mean foe, he would take advantage of every weakness we have. We all have weaknesses and he would take advantage of them, so she was bound for eighteen years. Then it says, “And Jesus, seeing her, called to her, and said to her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands upon her”. He identified Himself with her; identified Himself with the weak condition she was in, it says, “And he laid his hands upon her; and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God”. Then He speaks about her as “a daughter of Abraham”, there was potential there. There is potential with every believer, but Satan, if he had his way, would bind us and keep us in bondage, as he did with this woman for eighteen years. It was not an evil spirit; it is not called an unclean spirit, but a spirit of infirmity which Satan took advantage of; he will take advantage of every weakness we have. The Lord Jesus laid His hands upon her, He strengthened her, and immediately she was made straight and glorified God. It says later, “And as he said these things, all who were opposed to him were ashamed; and all the crowd rejoiced at all the glorious things which were being done by him”, Luke 13: 17. The Lord Jesus would call anyone who is bound; anyone who is depressed; anyone who has any kind of weakness, and give them strength.

Before closing I want to refer to Matthew 11 where the Lord calls certain persons. He says, “Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest”, Matt 11: 28. In this incident the Lord reviews His service in Galilee—He reviews the cities in which most of His mighty works were done, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, and there was little result. He was rejected. It would not be right to say the Lord was disappointed, but He felt the lack of result. Think of the Lord of glory, of God being here in Manhood in the Lord Jesus serving these cities, and being rejected! But He found resource in His Father. He said, “I praise thee, Father, Lord of the heaven and of the earth”, Matt 11: 25. He had resource in His Father to whom He turned. He said prophetically, “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain; nevertheless my judgment is with Jehovah, and my work with my God”, Isa 49: 4. He turned to the Father. Now He says, “Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened”. We may see little result, but He says in effect, I know what it is to labour and be burdened and see little result, I had a resource in My Father. He says, I know how you feel, come to Me, and I will be your resource. As Priest He understands this kind of feeling which many may have, but He says, “Come to me”. He had a resource in His Father. He says, “Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest”. There is rest there; it is a call to persons who have laboured and have been burdened and see little results of it all. Then He says, “Take my yoke upon you”. That yoke was the will of God, that is the yoke we take upon us, the yoke He took upon Himself we come into; “and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls”. Not only, “I will give you rest”, which is the Lord’s attitude, but “ye shall find rest”, that is experience, “ye shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”.

The Lord is calling every one of us. I wonder if every one of us will answer His call to repent, His call to discipleship; would there be anyone here? He is calling each little child. He is calling anyone who is depressed, who has an infirmity of which Satan has taken advantage. I would say again, Satan is a mean foe, he would take advantage of any weakness we have and have us cast down as he did with this woman for eighteen years. He would take advantage of any weakness we have, but the Lord would put His hands upon us, identify Himself with us, give us strength, give us power, no doubt by means of the Holy Spirit. He is able to do that, to strengthen us to overcome any spirit of infirmity and move forward in the pathway of faith pleasing to God. Then there is the call to anyone who has laboured and is burdened and seen little result; the Lord calls, He will give rest and you will find rest. May it be so for His Name’s sake!

**SYDNEY**

**11th October 1992**

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# NOT OF LETTER, BUT OF SPIRIT

**John 3: 3-6; 4: 23, 24**

**2 Timothy 1: 7, 8**

**Ephesians 1: 15-19**

These scriptures have been read because they contain the word “spirit”. There are other references to “spirit” in the New Testament; the spirit of faith; the spirit of meekness; the spirit of prophecy. It seems to suggest the essence of something, it is in contrast in some cases to letter, “not of letter, but of spirit”, 2 Cor 3: 6. I would like to say something about what is spirit—not of letter, but of spirit. We can have things in letter; we can have the Scriptures in letter; we can study ministry in letter, but there is something deeper than that, there is something more important than that, and that is what is called spirit. We were reading in Exodus in the meeting here this morning. In Exodus 20, God gave the law, the commandments, to Moses on stones which apparently God Himself made, and God wrote with His finger the commandments. We know what happened, these stones were shattered at the foot of the mountain, but certain things happen between that time and chapter 34. For instance, there is the tent set outside the camp; there is the appreciation of the mediatorship of Moses; there is God declaring His goodness; and according to the corresponding incident in Deuteronomy there is the ark to contain the two tables which Moses was to make. Moses made the second two tables, “Hew for thyself two tables of stone like the first”, Jehovah said to Moses, Deut 10: 1. So Moses hewed these stones and then carried them up the mountain, and God put the same words on these stones as on the first stones, but in Exodus 34, it speaks about the tenor of these words, “after the tenor of these words have I made a covenant with thee”, Exod 34: 27. Now that is more like the spirit of a thing, the tenor seems to me to involve a certain formation, not just apprehending mentally the letter, but the tenor, taking into consideration the One who gave the law, and the Mediator available, and all these things, it corresponds, I think, with this word spirit of which we read.

Now I begin with the initial matter of new birth which is spoken of here. The Lord says, “Except any one be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God”. Born anew, means it is different from natural birth, it is from an entirely new source, it is the sovereign activity of the Spirit of God in the person who becomes a believer; it is a sovereign operation, entirely different from anything of nature, born anew, from a new source and beginning of life. Then He says, “Except any one be born of water and of Spirit”, that is the same birth but it indicates a moral beginning. First it is born anew, that is entirely different, but then born of water and of Spirit indicates a moral beginning. Then the Lord says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”. It is obvious that that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that can never be improved, can never be altered. One of our early teachers has told us, You may sublimate the flesh as much as you like, it will never yield spirit. Flesh and spirit are opposed. The only thing that deals with the flesh is death, but that which “is born of the Spirit is spirit”. Now this spirit can be distinguished from the Holy Spirit; He is the One who has sovereignly imparted spirit. It could also be distinguished from the human spirit. Every human being has a spirit, but this is something different; this is something that has been imparted by the Holy Spirit of spirit in the believer. It has been likened to a germ which develops. We have no part in the sovereign imparting of what is called spirit, it is a sovereign operation of the Spirit, but it seems to me we have some part in the development of it. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit”, is the potential for being spiritual, the beginning of what is spiritual.

Let no believer ever say, I am not spiritual, because every believer has this element of spirit sovereignly given by the Holy Spirit. Maybe we have not followed up this element of spirit, that could be true, because I think we have a part in developing this germ, and that must be by the Spirit; it involves formation, and formation is by the Spirit. The Spirit is the One who forms us in spirituality, and it depends, therefore, on ourselves for what opportunity we give to the Spirit, what advantage we give to the Spirit, what time we give Him. What can we do to develop this element called spirit, which every believer has? Never say, I am not spiritual! If you are a real believer on the Lord Jesus you have the wherewithal, you have the potentiality to be spiritual. It depends on the development of this germ, and I would advise every young believer here, and every believer indeed, to value that germ sovereignly imparted to us by the Spirit. Value it, identify it. I suppose it leads to the inward man of Romans 7. You know, dear brethren, eventually we are going to be entirely spiritual, there will be nothing of nature, nothing material. What goes into eternity is only what is wrought by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we need to commit ourselves to identify this feature of spirit, and give the Holy Spirit opportunity for its development so that we may become spiritual persons. It is not beyond any believer to be spiritual. May we be encouraged!

Now in John 4 we have this word “spirit”, it says, “But the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth”. Now that is not exactly the human spirit, it is not exactly the Holy Spirit, it must refer to this “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”, it is the wherewithal to worship the Father intelligently and suitably. It goes on to say, “God is a spirit; and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth”. That is this matter of spirit, which we have derived from the Holy Spirit. I hardly know how to describe it, but I want to point out the distinction between it and the Holy Spirit and our human spirits. Every human being has a spirit, believer or unbeliever, but unbelievers do not have this spirit, “in spirit and truth” belongs to the believer. No doubt it refers back to chapter 3, “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”. I do not want to be mystical or difficult, but I would like to call attention to this feature, it seems to be so important, dear brethren, not letter but spirit. It is the wherewithal in the believer to worship God who is a spirit, to worship God suitably. What a privilege it is to worship God suitably, and that is in spirit and truth. Truth would, I suppose, refer to the revelation of God, how God is known, but spirit is something inward that rises up in worship; it is affected and responds suitably to God who is a spirit, it is a spiritual order of things into which the believer is brought. I trust it makes itself attractive to us all; not just to be content with the letter.

So we go on to 2 Timothy, and there again this idea of spirit comes in. This is in view of having part in the testimony of our Lord in a day of ruin in which we are, “God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, that kind of spirit. It is the character of spirit that is spoken of in John 3 and 4. It is not “a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”, the wherewithal to be intelligent and devoted in the testimonial situation no matter how rough or difficult it becomes. You hear sometimes, If there is any more trouble I am finished! That is the spirit of cowardice, that is not the kind of spirit that God has given us. God has given us a spirit of power to withstand, it is that kind of spirit that would stand—“Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner”. Paul was in prison. These were testing times, difficult times, and that has been extended to our time; the testimony is under reproach; the spirit we have been given has the character of power to stand and withstand, and of love. It is a fine balance; “of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”. “Wise discretion” is a very important feature in the time in which we are. It is to have a quiet, sound, sober mind. It involved judgment, we need wise discretion to be able to judge, to go by divine principles; that is the kind of spirit we have, not influenced by what is natural. Dear fellow believer, that is the kind of spirit God has given, “For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion”. How much wise discretion is needed at the present time!

We have all been given the same kind of spirit. It ought to unify us, to draw us together, to go on together. We have, of course, the gift of the Holy Spirit personally, but we have been given this character of spirit, of power, and of love, and of wise discretion. May the Lord help us, because sometimes we tend to go by letter! We hear parts of ministry quoted to support certain ideas—that is letter, that is not spirit, that is not the tenor; we need to get the tenor, the substance of the thing. I would appeal to all of us. There is no doubt that we all want to keep together, surely, but sometimes there seems to be very little holding us. Therefore we need this kind of mortar, this kind of spirit, of power, and of love, and of wise discretion; the same kind of spirit of wise discretion, the same kind of love, the same kind of power. God has given us this kind of spirit. May we be encouraged!

I just wanted to refer to Ephesians 1 which is something additional. It is not exactly presented as something God has given us. Paul prays that the Ephesians might be given it, because of “having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is in you, and the love which ye have towards all the saints”. There is a basis for Paul to pray thus for these believers. Is that true of us? Have we faith in the Lord Jesus and love towards all the saints, a universal outlook? Sometimes if we pray for all those with whom we walk we think we have a universal outlook, but we have prayed for a very, very small part of what the Lord has on the earth. I think we need to have love towards all the saints, even those who will not look at us or will not speak to us; we need to have this attitude. Maybe we have to be bound in our affections like Joseph was with his brethren. He had to restrain himself, and our affections cannot flow freely towards all but the affections ought to be with us. The Lord was girt about the breasts with a golden girdle with regard to the assemblies in Revelation 2 and 3. His love was there, it was restrained, but love was there. Our love which we have to all the saints would need a more universal outlook on all that the Lord has, all who love God at the present time, because those with whom we walk are very, very few, and consist of a very, very minimal percentage of all the Lord has. We need to have love to all the saints and a more universal outlook, I think, in our prayer meetings and our private prayers.

So he says, “Wherefore I ... do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you at my prayers”. Paul, in prison, must have had times which he set apart for prayer. I would like to have heard Paul praying—he had the care of all the assemblies; he would pray for every assembly intelligently; he would pray for every person he knew intelligently. “Who is stumbled, and I burn not?”, he said, 2 Cor 11: 29. What a heart he had! So he goes on, “making mention of you at my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him”. Our brother was speaking about what is positive, certainly the enemy would occupy us with what is negative, but there is so much positive truth to go in for; think of this spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory. How much there is to explore, to commit our minds to, to commit our affections to, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation”, that kind of spirit. Apparently they did not have it yet, but Paul prays that they may get it. No doubt Paul had this spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, but he prays for these Ephesians that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him”. What a thing to desire! I do not think we get this exactly by study or our own efforts, but we would not get it without desire. I think Paul would put this desire in the hearts of these Ephesians; to desire the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory. How great these things are! I would like myself to desire to have this; it is within our reach. I suppose it would depend on conditions, our desire, our ability to pursue it, the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him.

What kind of influence would a person like that have? We all exercise some kind of influence. Has it come from the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him? Dare we influence anybody otherwise? Do I dare to influence anyone apart from the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him? I ask myself sometimes, What kind of influence do I have? I appeal to each one of us to ask ourselves, What kind of influence am I having? What is the end in view of the influence that I am exerting? May we desire that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him”. Apparently it was available for the Ephesians. It is available for us. I think Paul put it into their minds, their affections to be bent on this desire, to set themselves to secure this; it is God given, they do not exactly reach it by their own energies, but their attitude would be such that God would impart it. Let us all, I would exhort every one, myself included, to desire this, then our influence would be right, towards the unity of the brethren and cohesion. This is not untempered mortar, but something that is going to bind us together, be a bond, the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him.

Paul goes on to say, “being enlightened in the eyes of your heart”, not your mind, not of letter but of spirit. I suppose the heart is the seat of the affections. The eyes of your heart must be the inlet of light, “being enlightened in the eyes of your heart, so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling”. It is His calling, and His inheritance, and His power. These positive things build us up, they would keep us together; they would yield fruit and pleasure for God; “so that ye should know what is the hope of his calling”, the calling of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory. The hope of His calling would be glory, of course, heaven, final conditions. We need hope to sustain us in testimony here. Was it not hope that the Thessalonians lacked? They are commended for their faith and love in the second epistle, but hope is not mentioned, and hope tends to weaken with us, tends to fade. If He calls, He has nothing but glory eventually in mind for us, “the hope of his calling”.

Then it says, “and what the riches”—wonderful language—“the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints”; the inheritance of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory. Think of the idea of His inheritance, it is the result of all divine workmanship, all divine patience, “his inheritance in the saints”. It must be Christ formed in the saints; nothing but Christ would be suitable for the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory. His inheritance in the saints must be Christ formed in the saints—“the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints”. Then, “what the surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe”. I just commend again what our brother has been commending to us as to what is positive, how important it is to be preserved in a positive way, that is what Paul is bringing before them here, something positive, very rich, very blessed, you could not think of anything more blessed than these things. His inheritance is the result of all divine workmanship, of all divine patience worked out in the saints; it must be Christ formed in the saints; nothing but Christ would be suitable. How important to be preserved in what is positive, that is what Paul is bringing before them here, something very rich, very blessed, you could not think of anything more so than these things. He says, “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him ... the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe”. All these things would encourage us; all these things would keep us bound together in affection, and outlook, so much needed at the present time.

That is all I have to say, but I desired to present and make attractive this kind of spirit which every believer has, that which is “born of the Spirit is spirit”. It has been spoken of as a germ, a potentiality that can develop into spirituality, and every believer has it. Let us be exercised therefore to provide conditions for the Spirit to effect this work of formation. I suppose we can all be more spiritual; it would be so if we could grow in this kind of thing, I think we could. We need these desires, this committal, in view of the worship of God. What rises in the believer towards God is this element of spirit. What is going to sustain us in the testimony is the spirit of power, and of love, and of wise discretion, and then to have in our hearts and our desires, this spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him. May the Lord encourage us; may He help us; may He set us in this direction. I can see the great importance of it. I can see that we tend to go by letter. Taking quotations from ministry to support certain ideas is the letter, that is not the tenor, it is not the spirit. When God speaks about the tenor that does not mean that He diminishes any item, every item is important, no item is omitted, but the tenor involves an understanding and appreciation of God in our souls, and some knowledge of the scope of His mind and His will.

**DUNDEE**

**10th August 1993**

# FOUR LIVING CREATURES

**Revelation 4: 4-8**

I have been exercised, dear brethren, regarding these living creatures. There are the twenty-four elders who would represent persons who were the subjects of the purpose of God. But the four living creatures are symbolic, it would seem, and they are very closely linked with the throne, they are almost part of the throne, in the midst of the throne and around the throne, four living creatures. I suppose the four living creatures would suggest the way in which God has secured His purpose. God’s purpose belongs to eternity; before God made time, or began to use time there was His purpose; we have that in Ephesians 1, “according as he has chosen us in him before the world’s foundation”, Eph 1: 4. Before Genesis 1: 1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”, there was God’s purpose. The heavens and the earth were not God’s purpose. God’s purpose had persons in mind before that; and the creation of the heavens and the earth were to be the means of securing His purpose. So these twenty-four elders I suppose would represent persons who, like ourselves, are the subject of God’s purpose before the world’s foundation, and that belongs to eternity, “from eternity to eternity thou art God”, Ps 90: 2. His purpose belongs to eternity, and is in view of His eternal pleasure, but He made time, and came into time, and worked in time that His eternal purpose might be secured.

Now I just want to say a few words about these living creatures. The first is like a lion; we read of the lion that he turns not away for any. That is, God has never been diverted from His purpose; He has never needed to modify His purpose, never needed to adjust it, nor alter it. What His purpose was before the world’s foundation is what He is going to accomplish without any addition or subtraction. What He purposed at the beginning before time began is going to be secured; that is the idea of the lion. He is not going to be diverted; evil came in but God is not diverted, and does not modify or alter His purpose. His original purpose is going to be secured. That is the lion; it belongs to the throne, it belongs to the working out of God’s purpose, but it comes into His ways.

The second living creature is like a calf. A calf has a steady tread, a firm tread; it suggests the working of the unhurried way in which God secures His purpose in time. Again to refer to Genesis 1: 1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”, that was at the beginning of God’s operations with His purpose in view. Then it says, “And the earth was waste and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep”. Apparently some evil power was operating; we do not know how long it was between verses 1 and 2; geologists and others tell us that it may have been many, many years. No doubt Satan fell and his angels in that period. It suggests the unhurried way in which God secures His purpose. God can wait—He made time and uses time; whether we can say verse 2 is time I am not sure, “And the earth was waste and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”. How long that continued we have no idea. Why did God allow this to happen? It is because He was in no hurry, there was no haste—“from eternity to eternity thou art God”. With Him one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. He is never diverted as suggested in the lion, but He has patience to work things out because He has in mind what is to be very substantial, not like what men build up sometimes quickly. He has something substantial in mind that is going into eternity, therefore God is unhurried about how He secures His purpose. There is this long gap between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1, and then you get four thousand years of God dealing with men in the Old Testament. It again speaks of the unhurried way in which God steadily secures what He has in mind. Then there have been nearly two thousand years in the securing of the assembly. There is no haste with God. He has in mind something very substantial, not something that is easily shaken, but something that He has in mind in view of eternity, something substantial for His pleasure and glory eternally. So there is the calf, it belongs to the throne, it is part of God’s ways. The lion suggests that He never deviates from His purpose, and the calf that He is unhurried in how He secures His purpose. Men are in a hurry, God is not in a hurry, He secures what He has in mind patiently.

Then you have the third living creature having the face as of a man. I suppose it refers to intelligence, I suppose it refers to wisdom. Think of the wisdom that has entered into God securing His purpose in time, and what resource of wisdom there is in God effecting His purpose. Paul wrote, “O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable his judgments, and untraceable his ways!”, Rom 11: 33. It all ends in glory to Him, glory eternally. It says, “how unsearchable his judgments, and untraceable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor? ... For of him, and through him, and for him are all things: to him be glory for ever, Amen”. The face of a Man speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ, the face of a Man in whom are all the riches and glory of wisdom.

Then finally there is the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. When the time comes there is no delay. There is no haste in God’s ways effecting His purpose, but when the moment comes for action there is no delay. Take the matter of judgment for instance, in Babylon, in one hour the judgment comes. There is the rapidity with which God can operate when the time comes, but meantime He patiently and unhurriedly in wisdom pursues the securing of His purpose. That is God—“from eternity to eternity thou art God”. It enlarges God in our thoughts and leads to the worship of God Himself.

**EDINBURGH**

**13th April 1993**

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# THE NORMAL ACTIVITIES OF THE SPIRIT

**Romans 8: 12-17**

**Galatians 6: 7-10**

**2 Corinthians 3: 17, 18**

J.R. Our hymn helped us to understand what God had in mind in purpose, given to the Son, and, in a sense, given to the Spirit too, that He may bring to pass the formation that was in mind in divine purpose. I thought we would inquire together as to the normal activities of the Spirit and that we should put ourselves in the way of these activities. It is normal to be led by the Spirit of God as in Romans 8—“as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”. But then we have to learn to operate by the Spirit—“if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live”: that is our part of the matter. We are to put to death the deeds of the body; we cannot do that of ourselves, and the Spirit will not do it for us, but we have to learn to operate by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the body that we may live. Then certain normal activities follow—led by the Spirit, we cry, Abba, Father, and the Spirit Itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. These are the Spirit’s normal operations which we put ourselves in the way of by certain actions of our own. In Galatians is the great matter of sowing to the Spirit. I would like to inquire about how we do that. When we sow anything we have a certain crop in view, because what we sow we reap. Therefore it is good to be intelligent in sowing, to sow to the Spirit so that of the Spirit we reap eternal life. Then in 2 Corinthians 3 there is what the Spirit will do, but there is our part in the matter—“we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image”. Again, that is the Spirit’s normal activity, to transform us, but then that depends, on our side, on looking on the glory of the Lord. That is what is in mind to inquire about.

C.F.D. Do you think that being led by the Spirit of God is in the wilderness setting of things? As we learn to be led by the Spirit of God in the wilderness, will that have its reflex in the service, because we are learning intimacy and nearness which will carry through?

J.R. Exactly. I suppose “led by the Spirit of God” refers to the last phase of the wilderness journey. In chapter 20 of Numbers Moses failed and Aaron died and Miriam died. There is no mention of the ark, there is no mention of the cloud; they sang to the Spirit and from that point they made progress in journeying. I think this refers to the last phase of the wilderness journey.

C.F.D. That helps us to understand how the Spirit relates Himself to the final movements of the testimony here. Do you think that, in the sphere of testimony, we are led by the Spirit, but when it comes to the collective side of things we are led by the Lord?

J.R. Surely, we are gathered for the service. The Lord takes over, I understand; His headship operates. But in that last phase of the wilderness journey as I said, Moses failed, Aaron died and Miriam died; there is no mention of the cloud, there is no mention of the ark which had been mentioned in chapter 10, but they are in principle led by the Spirit of God. It is like our own time; we do not have outstanding leaders like Moses and Aaron and that kind of thing, but the Lord calls our attention to the Spirit of God. Shall I say, it is more difficult? It causes more exercise to be led by the Spirit than it did to follow a lead in ministry for instance. It works in localities too, certainly at occasions like this, but the leading of the Spirit operates in a local gathering it seems to me.

C.F.D. Leadership of the Spirit operates in our local gatherings: now just open that up a bit.

J.R. Well, we know that everything administrative and everything in the service of God operates in our localities. In the end everything comes down to our local settings, to individuals, of course, but to our local settings. We do have the privilege of other gatherings together, like this occasion, but things work out locally, do they not?

C.F.D. I am just trying to get help on this thought that the Spirit of God is regulating things locally. The Spirit of God is establishing things in a locality and His work is coming to light, but you are expecting the Lord to lead us as we are together collectively, whether it is in a reading like this, in the service of God, or in the ministry meeting. Is that right?

J.R. I think so. We have no universal leaders nor one with the gift of government; I do not think so. Government depends on localities, and the quality of the government depends on the quality of the persons in the locality. This is a testing matter actually. Previously we had men who could call attention to principles applying and so on, but local difficulties now are worked out locally. So much depends on conditions in our localities.

L.McF. We speak of the Spirit coming in and helping us, but room has to be made for Him. Conditions have to be such that He is free to serve, do you think?

J.R. Yes, I think so. Did not the princes dig the well?—“Well which princes digged”, Num 21: 18. That was the exercise of persons who have gone before us to make room for the Spirit. I like to think of room for the Spirit but also putting ourselves in the way of the Spirit’s activities to give Him the advantage. We either give advantage to Him or to the flesh, do we not? The flesh and the Spirit are opposed to each other. Anything of the flesh or the first man hinders the Spirit’s activities.

L.McF. I was noticing that. It says in verse 6: “For the mind of the flesh is death”; and then in the next verse: “the mind of the flesh is enmity against God”. It is negative in a way but still we need to see that such a line of things does not get us anywhere.

J.A.P. What you say is confirmed in Acts 15, is it not? In the discussion the apostles referred to the Holy Spirit, and then when the meeting is over they said, “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit” (v 28). Would that be what you have in mind?

J.R. I think so. “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” was the conclusion, was it not? I think it is more difficult, more testing, to be led by the Spirit than in former years when we followed universal ministry. Of course we have it all in print now, but currently, as far as I can see, things depend on what is local. Hence the need for the building up of personnel in our local assemblies. I say again, the quality of government in the locality depends on the quality of the persons in the locality. We have had abundance of instruction; we have the advantage of the teaching of all those who have gone before, but we do not have their personal influence. The object in reading ministry is not just to get our heads filled but to take on the features that were displayed in those who ministered. It is a deeper exercise than just to quote.

C.S.E. I was looking at Acts 13: 2: “And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said”. That speaking would come through someone in the locality, but the background is that they were ministering to the Lord. Do you think that is basic?

J.R. That is good. Now that you have called attention to that scripture, who was ministering to the Lord and fasting? Were they these five persons mentioned? It says, “Now there were in Antioch, in the assembly which was there, prophets and teachers”—there are five names mentioned, “and as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting”. Does that refer to these five persons? They were in the assembly in Antioch but it seems to refer to the five persons mentioned. In other words, they made themselves available to be sent by the Spirit by the attitude of ministering to the Lord and fasting. What do you say about it?

C.S.E. I thought there might have been more persons there at the time but these were prominent. I suppose the ones mentioned were the ones who were used to bring in the mind of the Spirit, but I am not too sure.

J.R. It seems like that. It says, “Now there were in Antioch, in the assembly which was there”, certain persons; and then, “as they were ministering to the Lord”—they were in the assembly, and they were persons who were exercised so that the Spirit could call them in view of service. So He comes to persons in localities. What do you say?

C.S.E. It sounds good. They were in a state, as you have been saying, to be used by the Spirit; the Spirit had ready access, if I might use that word, to these men to use them to bring in the mind of the Lord.

J.R. Exactly. Two were sent and three were left, because to care for the local setting is very important, is it not? There were two to go to the work but three were left there; in fact the first mentioned and the last mentioned were sent, the others were left there to care for and keep the locality right.

J.A.P. Officially the Lord gives the lead in the assembly, He leads the praise, but in a way the Spirit, if made room for, might help us to arrive at something. Maybe you could distinguish that a little more for us.

J.R. It seems to me the Spirit is immediately with us; He dwells in the bodies of the saints. The Lord is not immediately with us, He is with us mediately. The Spirit, shall we say, is nearer to us than any other One of the Godhead. Is that true?

J.A.P. That is very helpful to me. The Lord Jesus comes and goes but the Spirit is here all the time as we gather.

J.R. Yes. He dwells in the believer and dwells in the company.

C.F.D. When the objective response to the Holy Spirit was being opened up amongst us, reference was made to the Spirit’s ‘augmentary service’. Does that fit in in relation to what our brother said?

J.R. I would think so.

G.D.P. In the wilderness setting it says, “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee to the place that I have prepared. Be careful in his presence, and hearken unto his voice: do not provoke him, for he will not forgive your transgressions; for my name is in him”, Exod 23: 20, 21. Is that the thought of the Spirit’s presence?

J.R. That is very good and very important; it has often been referred to as the Spirit; “Behold, I send an Angel before thee”—a capital ‘A’, is it not? In verse 23 it says, ‘‘for mine Angel shall go before thee”; it is not any angel, it is “mine Angel”. That is what the Lord says in Revelation: “I Jesus have sent mine angel”, chap 22: 16. Perhaps it is a special intimacy.

J.A.P. That is very good.

J.R. That is our side of the matter, is it not? The Spirit will lead us and it is proper to sonship to be led by the Spirit, but our side is to put to death the propensities of the body, anything that would obstruct, anything that would hinder the normal operation of the Spirit of God. It goes on to say: “ye have received a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father”. That is again the Spirit’s normal activity. “The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God”. Room is made for all that by our putting to death the deeds of the body, that is our side of the matter; and then it is what the Spirit is active in, His normal activities.

C.F.D. How do you employ the power of the Spirit in putting to death the deeds of the body?

J.R. As far as I can see, you must intend to put to death the deeds of the body. You must intend to keep subject the propensities of the body. We must first of all have that desire and have that intention. Then we find practically that we do not have the power to do it ourselves, we have to learn to do it by the Spirit. The Spirit will help us as we do that but we must first of all desire and intend. Do you agree?

C.F.D. You are helping us because it is a very practical matter. What you are saying seems to me is involved in the fact that the Spirit does not assert Himself; the desire has to come from our side and we employ His power to work through the matter. But He does not assert Himself as to our matters, does He?

J.R. That is right. You see it with Rebecca. “They called Rebecca and said to her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go”, Gen 24: 58. But later on it says, “Rebecca arose ... And the servant took Rebecca”. When she arose the servant took her to her destination, but He waits until she arises.

K.N.P. She was ready with the answer to that question. It is a question whether we are amenable to be taken by the Spirit. She had some experience with the servant earlier at the well.

J.R. She was not the product of the servant, she was the product of the well, I suppose. She lived by drawing from the well. It was not the first time she had come to the well when the servant arrived, but the servant took her on as she was able to answer to his own desires. I think the well is a local idea. I do not want to say too much, but men find water and then they build their cities where the water is. It is a local idea. Rebecca lived by the local well, you might say, and she was formed in a certain character by living that way.

L.McF. Moses sat by the well in early Exodus and that was the commencement of operations in him, do you think?

J.R. Yes. It was a big change for Moses to sit by the well. The seven daughters of Jethro came along; the shepherds hindered, but Moses arose and helped them. He did not slay the shepherds as he did the Egyptian, which he could well have done, I suppose. A different character was formed by sitting by the well.

L.McF. Putting to death the deeds of the body is not a once and for all matter. It has to be maintained as long as we are here.

J.R. Exactly. It flows from being minded to do so; I have a certain purpose in mind and to arrive at it I am minded not to allow the propensities of the body to operate.

J.A.P. Would what we are saying open up John’s ministry a little? After chapter 13 the Lord Jesus dwelt much on the Spirit, as if to say, the apostles will have their place but it is the Spirit finally who will help us to the end of this dispensation. Is that it?

J.R. I am sure.

J.A.P. Is what you are saying that, when the well is sung to in Numbers 21, leadership in the ordinary sense receded?

J.R. That is right; and they are able to overcome Sihon and Og later on. They were to overcome these giants in principle in the power of the Spirit, two big men—self-importance and self-indulgence I suppose. It is like putting to death the deeds of the body. If the body had its way it would be self-important and self-indulgent, but by the Spirit we have power to overcome these giants.

A.S.H. To communicate spiritual things by spiritual means (see 1 Cor 2: 13) you would have to be indwelt by the Spirit. I was thinking of what John says, “I became in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”, Rev 1: 10. But as a continual thing, it is a different point, is it not?

J.R. Yes. We read this morning about Simeon: “it was divinely communicated to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death before he should see the Lord’s Christ”, Luke 2: 26. The Spirit must have had His way with him; there was no hindrance on his side. The Spirit will communicate with us if we are in a suited state, as you say.

C.S.E. So practically at the Supper, if I take part early I need the Spirit’s help to be maintained throughout the service; if I take part late, then I need the Spirit’s help to maintain me right up to that point.

J.R. I am sure that is so. It is quite remarkable how the service of God is maintained actually. Our difficulty to maintain things is more through the week though, because things work at the Supper pretty well, I would think; it is one of the occasions when the body functions, because no one is prominent, we are all helpers one of another and promote the one thing.

D.McF. I wondered if you could help us as to being taught by the Spirit. Is that something different?

J.R. I would not think so. The scripture quoted from 1 Corinthians 2 refers to being taught by the Spirit and is very important. It says, “which also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, communicating spiritual things by spiritual means. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him”. Then he speaks about the fleshly man, which is somewhat different. The natural man is what the note indicates: ‘the man animated merely by his created soul, without the teaching and power of the Holy Spirit’. We have the advantage in having the Spirit and to be taught by Him. In fact it goes on there to say, “But we have the mind of Christ”. By having the Spirit we think as the Lord does; this is a lot to say but it is possible. “We have the mind of Christ”, it says, the thinking faculty. What do you say about that?

C.F.D. It is certainly a great test. It is marvellous to think that the thinking faculty or the mind of the Lord is available to us through the power of the Spirit of God. I think it enhances the whole thought of the Spirit.

J.R. It says earlier in that chapter (v 11): “For who of men hath known the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? thus also the things of God knows no one except the Spirit of God”. In other words, if I had your spirit I would know exactly how you acted, what motivated you. Well, we have the Spirit which is of God. It is an amazing thing. “We have received”, it says, “not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which have been freely given to us of God: which also we speak”. We do not realise the value of having the Spirit which is of God. He has given us not only His Spirit but He has given us of His Spirit.

C.F.D. What is the difference?

J.R. Well, it is a little nearer: “I will pour out of my Spirit”, Acts 2: 17. It is because we have the Spirit which is of God that we have the mind of Christ.

G.D.P. I do not know whether this is right, but Caleb had “another spirit in him”, Num 14: 24. He could communicate what the divine mind was, whether they should go up and so on.

J.R. Exactly.

J.A.P. I was told that what men call prohibition is really a substitute for the Spirit. If we want to be right we seek grace from the Spirit to help us to be right.

J.R. Exactly. It says in 1 John 4: 13: “Hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, that he has given to us of his Spirit”. What can we say? “Given to us of his Spirit”; does He share His Spirit with us? Is that going too far?

C.F.D. No. It is raising enquiries in our minds. Does “of his Spirit” relate to the fact that it takes the whole assembly for the Spirit to find its abode? We have “of his Spirit”, each has part in that sense. Now the Lord was great enough to have the Spirit in its entirety, but it requires all the saints at the present time. Is that what is involved in this expression “of his Spirit”?

J.R. I suppose it is in the fulness of it. It says, “if God has so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, that he has given to us of his Spirit”, 1 John 4: 11-13.

K.N.P. Would “of” be something of the character, and should that character come out in us?

J.R. I think so.

J.A.P. According to the section that you referred to in 1 John 4, “the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world”, v 14. We could not get into that testimony unless this other side is right, love amongst ourselves. These things are in the power of the Spirit.

J.R. Quite so. Now in Galatians we have sowing to the Spirit. We are sure to get the crop we sow. It is good to be alerted as to what we are sowing because we will surely reap that crop, it is inevitable. Maybe later in our lives we wish we had sown a different seed.

C.F.D. In that section why does he begin the verse that way: “Be not deceived: God is not mocked”?

J.R. It would alert us, would it not? “Be not deceived: God is not mocked” does not mean that He does not like to be mocked; He is not mocked. “Whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap”. It is true; whatever we sow when we are young we reap according to that crop.

C.F.D. I am sure it is so. But it is something we do not think very much about when we are young. In the world they say that a young man has to sow his wild oats, but that was never intended to be in Christianity. Surely if you put a certain seed in the ground, that is the seed that is going to come up; you cannot change that.

J.R. No, you cannot.

K.N.P. Is it of note that in chapter 5 he refers to the fruit of the Spirit, and then in chapter 6 to the sowing? Is it an encouragement to sow in the right direction? If you know what the fruit of sowing to the Spirit is, it helps and encourages us to go in for it.

J.R. I think that is right and very important.

L.McF. There are those who are habitually at the meetings. I think that is part of sowing to the Spirit.

J.R. I am sure it is. It goes on to say, “he that sows to the Spirit, from the Spirit shall reap eternal life: but let us not lose heart in doing good; for in due time, if we do not faint, we shall reap. So then, as we have occasion, let us do good towards all, and specially towards those of the household of faith”. It is a very practical matter; it is how we live really. We are sure to get a crop according to what we sow.

L.McF. It is not all negative; the positive side is in view.

J.R. Yes, exactly.

J.A.P. I suppose that one of the concerns we all have in our localities is not just to attend the meetings, right as that is, but to come up with some sense of freshness. Would what you are saying help us?

J.R. I think so. So we read 2 Corinthians 3, these two important verses: “But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory”. It is how we become like the Lord and become like each other too. But it depends on our looking in that direction: “we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face”. That is, His face is unveiled. Transformation takes place by the Spirit effortlessly as our outlook is on the glory of the Lord. When a seed produces fruit, it is effortless, it is life. And so with this transformation, it is what the Spirit does inwardly and, as far as we are concerned, effortlessly. Our side is to look on the glory of the Lord.

C.F.D. Therefore again we have to come to the fact that there has to be the desire for this. Moses said to Jehovah, “Let me ... see thy glory”, Exod 33: 18. That showed the inward working of the man’s affection, did it not? He had a desire to see the glory of the Lord. Do you think this is important for us? This is a collective idea, is it not? As we come up to the Supper should there not be this desire in our hearts to see the glory of the Lord?

J.R. I am sure. It is only one hour a week. I think “we all” is not collective. It is not ‘you all’, it is not the locality in Corinth, it is “we all”, that is all believers individually; that is as I see the context of it. We apply it, of course, to coming up to the Supper, which is very true, but it says “we all”, that is all believers. It includes Paul and those writing with him and the Corinthians—“we all”. What do you say about that?

C.F.D. That is the way we have been helped to understand it, that it involves all believers. I think, what you are saying is certainly right. “We all” is open to all believers, but behind it there has to be a relationship with the Spirit of God.

J.R. If we all answer to verse 18 we will all be together. We will be transformed according to the same image, that is like the Lord Jesus and like each other; that is the work of transformation.

J.A.P. I need a little clarification on this. Paul was writing from Ephesus and is saying to the Corinthian brethren, “we all”; he is including himself and them, but would you allow that we touch this in the service of God on Lord’s day morning?

J.R. O yes! it works then, but that is one hour of the week.

K.N.P. Would Romans help us? It says, “be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”, chap 12: 2. That would be all the time, would it not, and involve the Spirit?

J.R. Exactly. But if this was our occupation we would become more like the Lord Himself and more like each other. This is the direction in which we are meant to be looking constantly, looking on the glory of the Lord. That is how near the Lord and the Spirit are if, very closely linked, are They not?

C.F.D. You are making this very practical. You are speaking about the Supper involving one hour of the week. Now we are in our homes on Monday morning. Do you look for the glory of the Lord at the family reading and prayer? How is this worked out?

J.R. It seems to me it is looking in that direction, occupied in that direction. Of course you have work to do and duties to perform, and so on, but the main line of our thinking is verse 18.

C.F.D. That is very helpful.

C.S.E. In Hebrews 12, with regard to the race, it says, “looking stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith”, v 2. It is the same idea. The note says, ‘looking away from other things and fixing the eye exclusively on one’. Would that help us?

J.R. That is just the idea.

G.D.P. Do we see that in Stephen? “But being full of the Holy Spirit, having fixed his eyes on heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God”, Acts 7: 55. He becomes like the Lord later on.

J.R. He certainly was like the Lord. He had the same kind of spirit like the Lord had: “lay not this sin to their charge”. Martyrs must have been maintained by this attitude; bound at the stake, enduring excruciating sufferings, they were able not only to suffer but suffer in a right spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Wonderful, really! And they prayed for their persecutors.

G.D.P. The first scripture says if we suffer with Him but it refers also to our being joint heirs with Him.

J.R. Quite so. I think “we all” is individual, that is, we all individually have our attention in this direction. How we answer to it, of course, is another matter, a matter for exercise I suppose, but it is the only way to be transformed according to the same image. Transformed is progressive; it is cumulative and progressive.

C.F.D. The note is ‘*metamorphosis*’ which may be a progressive idea.

J.A.P. In Exodus 34, when Moses came down from the mountain, there is the thought of the glory, but it was restrained in the people because of their state, but here it is not to be restrained. There was distance with the people and Moses, but Paul is at something very close here, our relations with the Lord Jesus.

J.R. If the people had Moses’ spirit they could have looked on his face. We have the Spirit of the Lord, we have His Spirit, and therefore we can look on His glory. If the people had had Moses’ spirit they could have been formed in that spirit, but they had not that spirit. They were at a distance, as you say. But we are not of letter but of spirit, the Spirit quickens; the Lord is the Spirit.

J.A.P. Which divine Person is that?

J.R. It seems that the Spirit and the Lord are so closely linked that it is difficult sometimes to distinguish, but I think when it says “even as by the Lord the Spirit” there are two Persons there, the Lord Jesus and the Spirit, so closely linked together. Our looking is to be on the Lord Jesus personally; the Spirit operates in us in view of formation. What do you say about it?

J.A.P. I am helped by what you say. Then it says, “but where the Spirit of the Lord is”; that is very close too. Sometimes we are cut and dried a little bit, but there is mystery in this great matter, is there not?

J.R. Surely.

C.F.D. So you could only look on the glory of the Lord by the Spirit; that is the only spiritual vision that we have, is it not?

J.R. Hebrews says, “we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honour”, chap 2: 9. That must be by faith and by the Spirit. There is a very close link between the Lord and Spirit in this chapter. He said earlier in the chapter; “Ye are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read of all men, being manifested to be Christ’s epistle ministered by us, written, not with ink, but the Spirit of the living God”. Then it goes on to, “the Lord is the Spirit, but where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”. Transformed is that we are progressively changed. It is applied to the Supper—I suppose it does apply then, we are transformed at the Supper—but we come back to where we were before. This involves a continual and progressive transformation, does it not?

C.F.D. You are helping us, giving us a general application of something that is to go on all the time. If five minutes ago you had put that question to me—we are transformed according to the same image—I would have related the idea of metamorphosis more to the time when we are progressing through the service of God. We are going forward, there is change, and it all involves the Spirit of God, involves looking on the glory; it is a progressive idea during that period of time. Would it be right to think that?

J.R. At the end of it we come back to it, we are formed.

C.F.D. We are still sitting on our seats: is that what you mean?

J.R. Yes. This involves, as far as I see, a progressive transformation—progressive and cumulative. Would that we progressed more in this way and were together more and like each other, because we become like the Lord by reason of the Spirit’s work of transformation.

A.S.H. He makes Himself known in the breaking of bread. As He comes in we would view Him in the progression that we just spoke about and we would be in unison moving on together. We view Him through the eye of faith and the Spirit. Would that be right?

J.R. Yes, faith and the Spirit go together. It has been said—and I think there is some truth in it—that the Spirit helps us according to the measure of our faith. All we have down here is in faith. We do not see anything by sight yet: we will eventually. We see each other of course: that is very important, and to get the best of each other too. The fact that we are reduced in numbers gives us a fresh appreciation of each; maybe the Lord intends that.

J.A.P. What you are saying about the service of God expanding is very interesting and it leads to greater things, which is like the house in Ezekiel, the only house that expands as it goes up. I think it is very fine, that the Supper is in the wilderness and all the preciousness of it, but what it leads to is wonderful to think of.

J.R. It says, “according to the same image from glory to glory”, that is progressive from one glory to another, is it not? I do not deny that it takes place at the Supper, but this is what is meant to come into our lives, that there is progression from glory to glory. We are together for an hour in the week at the Supper and we usually do well then, but it is through the week where we need this transformation. Would that be right?

L.McF. So we begin at home; we do not wait until we get to the Supper.

C.F.D. We come from a sphere of glory; there is glory in the houses as there was amongst the children of Israel; we come up with that into a realm of glory and that leads on to the glory of sonship. Is that the way this expands?

J.R. Well, do we go back to the glory of our houses again?

C.F.D. We would have to go back.

J.R. Yes, but it seems to me that “from glory to glory” is progressive; you do not go back to anything, you keep going on; it is cumulative, progressive.

C.F.D. I need help as to what you are saying because, if we get into what is heavenly in the service of God, which is the intention, we do not stay in it all the time; we have to come back to our circumstances, but we can come back as heavenly personalities. Would you say that?

J.R. That is quite true.

K.N.P. Is the key the “looking on”? Looking would be all the time, would it not? That is how it would work out and would maybe apply when we get home too.

J.R. That is what I would say. After the Supper we very soon drop down, do we not? There we certainly make progress on the way up, but when the meeting is over we very soon come back to earth.

C.F.D. After the meeting is over you can hear all kinds of conversation going on that really does not belong to heaven at all.

J.R. Exactly. This does not contemplate that; it is transformation, progressive transformation from glory to glory, not to come back to what we left.

K.N.P. Do we come back with something more than we left with?

J.R. Yes we do.

K.N.P. That involves progression, does it not? Our appreciation of Christ is increased as we look on Him and His glory.

J.R. Quite so. And we get impressions at the Supper, too, which are very valuable, something to work out through the week.

K.N.P. As we get more impressions it would help us to keep looking, so it is a self-fulfilling thing, is it not?

J.R. I think so.

**PLAINFIELD**

**13 November 1993**

*These notes were revised for first publication but not by Mr Renton*

**Key to initials -**

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# EARLY PREACHINGS OF THE GOSPEL

**Acts 2: 36-38; 3: 19-21; 4: 8-12; 11: 20-26**

I would just like to say a few words about these early preachings. I would like to refer to chapter 2 of Acts because that is the first preaching, and there is a certain freshness and power about that preaching. I did not read the whole preaching; it is the longest of these preachings we have read about in these chapters. Peter goes over the whole history, the whole matter of the intervention of God in the Lord Jesus, how He was, it says, delivered up “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain. Whom God has raised up”, Acts 2: 23, 24. The great subject of the first preaching was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from among the dead. That was the great testimony rendered that called for faith on the part of souls. Now that is still the subject of the gospel, because the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ involves a work completed.

We read of the Lord Jesus in the gospels and it is very interesting to read about His movements; but all the gospels end with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and His burial too. So the gospel goes out in the book of the Acts from the standpoint of the work undertaken by the Lord Jesus being completed, and His being highly exalted; showing God’s satisfaction. His complete pleasure in that finished work, and then proclaiming it, so that there can be the meeting of any need. If there is any need with men, women, or young people it can be answered in the Lord Jesus Christ raised from the dead. He is the One who undertook the sin question and who answered to God for the departure and lawlessness on the part of men. It is wonderful that the Lord Jesus should make Himself available as Saviour! In fact He made Himself answerable to God for the departure of mankind. He Himself was perfect, of course, a Man of another order, come from heaven, not one of Adam’s fallen race, but One who was in every way in accord with the will of God. But He took the sinner’s place, that is a tremendous transaction which only He could undertake. He took it vicariously on behalf of others. We were in the sinner’s place, we were all sinners, but He took the sinner’s place to establish on the ground of redemption a claim upon all. This great work was completed to God’s satisfaction, and gave Him a righteous basis to recover man to Himself. All has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ at infinite cost to Himself. In fact, scripture tells us He was made sin. It is difficult to understand but that is what scripture says, “Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us, that we might become”—believers might become—“God’s righteousness in him”, 2 Cor 5: 21. I am not attempting to explain all that, but let the truth of it sink into our souls, the immensity of the work undertaken by our Lord Jesus Christ and accomplished for God’s satisfaction.

His resurrection and His present position are evidence of how God is satisfied with that work. That is the basis on which God will build His universe, the righteous basis has been secured through the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are great things to think about, the tremendous undertaking on the part of the Lord Jesus. As it says, “coming into the world he says ... thou hast prepared me a body”, Heb 10: 5. That was a body of flesh and blood in which He could suffer, in which He could die, to undertake the work of redemption, to satisfy God as to the whole matter of departure, and answer to God regarding the enemy’s work too; the enemy’s work was involved in the departure. So Peter begins by saying, “This Jesus”, the One who was here among men. He was speaking to persons who knew Him, he was speaking in Jerusalem where the Lord was crucified. That was a great public matter. Peter said, “This Jesus has God raised up, whereof all we are witnesses”. Then he says, “Let the whole house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him, this Jesus”, this Jesus, the One whom they knew, the One whom they had seen, the One whom they had seen crucified, “God has made him, this Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”. He is in a position of glory and exaltation and authority.

Now it says, “And having heard it they were pricked in heart”. That was a good thing; I suppose they were convicted. “They were pricked in heart, and said to Peter and the other apostles, What shall we do, brethren?”. They virtually said, Is there any remedy? We can see how wrong we are, we are convicted as to the tremendous sin we have committed, is there any answer to it? “What shall we do, brethren?” And Peter says, There is an answer, an answer to that great sin of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is God’s answer to it in the resurrection of Christ, and there is to be man’s answer in repentance. “Peter said to them, Repent”. First of all there was conviction, that is how we begin, we begin as being convicted sinners, and then the next step is we are to repent, take our true place of repentance before God as guilty sinners. There were three thousand converted, but each one had to have this personal experience with God, because repentance is towards God. He is the One whom we have offended, our offences and sins have been against God, and our repentance is towards God. How otherwise could a sinner approach God? He cannot approach God on his own righteousness because he has none, but he repents and approaches God on the righteousness of Another, and on the basis of the work accomplished and completed by Another. But repentance is a deep work, it is not a superficial thing, it is the work not only of our minds but of our hearts, our affections. The whole being of a man, woman, or young person is affected in repentance. It is not only being sorry for our sins, although it includes that, it includes a review of our history and viewing our state as God views it. “Repent”, that is the first word, “and be baptised”, well that would be committal to the death of Christ. A person who truly repents does not continue in his course of lawlessness. A person who repents is not happy in continuing a course of lawlessness, because he has reached something in his soul about his lawless course, and repentance involves a committal to the end of that. So if repentance is real, he is no longer happy in a course of lawlessness, but counts on the Lord’s help to be here for the will of God. That is in principle what baptism is, “Repent, and be baptised, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins”.

I often refer to this, remission of sins. Now they found themselves guilty of one sin, and very often in a person with a sense of guilt, it would be one sin that is in the person’s mind. That was so here. But remission of sins is not only for that one sin. I may be convicted of one sin, but not only is God prepared to remit that sin. He would remit my whole course of sins. A sinner coming to God could never recount all his sins, they are so many; in a lifetime of so many years of lawlessness, he could never count all his sins, but maybe one sin might convict him, and God would say, I will remit all your sinful history. Is not that magnanimous on the part of God? How gracious God is! He is prepared to forgive all our sins. He was ready to forgive all the sins of those persons, not only the sin of the crucifixion of Christ, which actually Peter later mentions as a sin of ignorance, a sin of inadvertence, but he says, “for remission of sins”. It is a tremendous thing to have our sins remitted. It is forgiveness, but it is more than forgiveness. Forgiveness could be attitude, but remission means that the matter is finally and fully settled and will never rise again in our lifetime here, and never rise hereafter.

Then he says, “and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”, that is what is available in the glad tidings, available for all men at the present time, “the gift of the Holy Spirit”. It was looked forward to in the Old Testament, but is available now because of the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection, and His exaltation. The Holy Spirit is available now as a gift and is offered in the glad tidings. Now this preaching was to the house of Israel, and is based on the great matter of the gift of the Holy Spirit. What aroused the interest of persons, what had brought them together to listen to the preaching, was the fact that the Holy Spirit had been given and there was evidence of it in persons, whom they had heard speaking in their own tongues the great things of God. There was evidence of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that became the basis for the first preaching.

Now the second preaching, in Acts 3, was based on a lame man who was made to walk; that is, a witness here to the power of God in the glad tidings, one who had been carried daily at the gate of the temple and was made to walk. He was known to be a cripple, and there was evidence of the power of God’s kingdom in that he is made able to walk, and that became the basis for the second preaching. Peter says, “Repent therefore and be converted, for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and he may send Jesus Christ, who was foreordained for you ...”, that is an appeal to the nation of Israel that if the nation repented there could be times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord and He would send Jesus Christ. That was the outlook at that time, if the nation had repented, but the nation did not repent, and that gave God the liberty to extend the glad tidings further. The first gospel was to Jews. The assembly was formed by a remnant of the Jews, but God was justified in extending the glad tidings further because the favoured nation of Israel refused the glad tidings. God used that to extend the glad tidings further.

The third preaching I read of, in Acts 4, was preached to opposers. In the first three chapters of the Acts there is no opposition. There is testimony based, as I said, on the gift of the Holy Spirit, based on the man who was made to walk, evidence of the power of God, there was no opposition. In chapter 4 the opposition began, and what Peter stresses in this third preaching is this, “salvation is in none other”. He gives them an opportunity, but he says, There is no alternative. He says, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we this day are called upon to answer as to the good deed done to the infirm man, how he has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazaræan, whom ye have crucified, whom God has raised from among the dead, by him this man stands here before you sound in body”, and then he says, “And salvation is in none other”. He brings before that nation that there is no alternative. That is important in the glad tidings, there is no alternative. There is salvation in no other. If He is refused, there is no salvation, nothing left but judgment. How solemn that is. He says, “salvation is in none other, for neither is there another name under heaven which is given among men by which we must be saved”. There is no alternative but to accept God’s terms, accept the Saviour of His providing and His finished work; there is no alternative.

Now in chapter 11 you can see that certain history has elapsed which gives God the liberty for the word to go out to other nations. There were those who preached to Jews only (Acts 11: 19), but there were others who went into Antioch and preached to the Greeks also, preached to the nations. God is justified in extending His glad tidings, and so since then the gospel has been preached worldwide to all men. It is God’s thought that all men should be saved. Think of the outlook God has, God “desires that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”, 1 Tim 2: 4. Not only does God desire that all men should be saved but He has made provision for all men, because of “the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all”. That is, there is God’s desire for all men and God’s provision for all men, so that the glad tidings come to Antioch here, and it says that these persons announced “the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus”. Think of that coming to Antioch, coming to a gentile city, “the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus”, what glad tidings that would be! It was the first time in that city the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus were preached, and then it says, “the Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord”. That is a fine word, “turned to the Lord”. We have the Thessalonians who “turned to God from idols”, 1 Thess 1: 9. Here they turned to the Lord, they found their outlook in the Lord, their resources in the Lord. How fine that is! It says, “a great number believed and turned to the Lord”, and they found in Him all the resource they needed, “And the report concerning them reached the ears of the assembly which was in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go through as far as Antioch: who, having arrived and seeing the grace of God, rejoiced, and exhorted all with purpose of heart to abide with the Lord”. That is, the preaching was of the Lord Jesus, and the Lord’s hand was with the preachers, and the converts turned to the Lord and Barnabas exhorted them with purpose of heart to abide with the Lord. It is a great thing to know the Lord, to be subject to the Lord, to come into the kingdom of God, and to come under the Lord’s authority and protection. That is what these persons did, and it says that “he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith; and a large crowd of people were added to the Lord”. You see it is the Lord who is emphasised, the Lord Himself, the authority of the Lord, they come under a new authority, come under a new Master. That is an important step in a believer’s life. He may be convicted, and repent, and receive the remission of sins and the gift of the Spirit, and then come under the Lord’s authority. He is no longer lawless, but comes under the Lord’s authority. That is a very important matter, coming into the kingdom, coming under the authority of the Lord.

Now it says that Barnabas went away to Tarsus to seek out Saul and found him and brought him to Antioch, “And so it was with them that for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd”. I want to come to this, the importance of teaching. First of all there is to be subjection to the Lord in the kingdom, and then divine teaching is required to provide instruction for believers. These were two servants, Barnabas and Saul, working together, both of the same mind, both advocating the same teaching. It says, “for a whole year”, which is a whole course of teaching. It is not an overnight matter. These believers must have committed themselves to this course of teaching, and I suppose week after week for a whole year, “so it was with them that for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd”. Now a large crowd became an assembly, they became one under the teaching of Barnabas and Saul, these able teachers. It says, “and taught a large crowd: and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch”. There was something of testimony. It was what others called them, I suppose unbelievers called them Christians because they were different, they came under this teaching and they were different persons. The kingdom is important, involving subjection in mind to the Lord so that we take in divine teaching. These persons would all be taught the same way. It formed their way of thinking, and that forms assembly character, that is, we think the same way because we have been subject to the same Lord and subject to the same teaching. I just want to impress how important that is. So these persons were stable, having had a whole year’s course of instruction, and they were first called Christians in Antioch.

We read in Acts 13, “Now there were in Antioch, in the assembly which was there”. There was the formation of assembly character in these persons through divine teaching. The gospel has in mind that we should have remission of sins, the gift of the Spirit, and come under the Lord’s authority, then come under His teaching so that our minds are formed, how we think. We would be formed according to God, not in independent thinking but, as Paul writes to the Philippians, thinking the same thing, thinking one thing, see Phil 2: 2. That is the result of divine teaching. May the Lord encourage us, for His Name’s sake.

**PLAINFIELD**

**14th November 1993**

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# SECRET HISTORY WITH GOD

**Daniel 6: 10, 11**

I am wondering, dear brethren, if Daniel 6, verse 10, gives us the secret of Daniel’s faithfulness from the very beginning. He was carried away in the first captivity, that is, he went through the whole seventy years of the captivity. He must have been about ninety, I suppose, when the recovery took place. But he is one of the princes, one of the nobility, not only was he born one of the nobility but he was morally one of the nobles of Israel. He was carried captive, a teenager I suppose, a youth, and his faithfulness was remarkable all through. What caused him to refuse the king’s delicate food and to prescribe the pulse and water? I think we get the secret in this chapter 6, where it says, “he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his upper chamber toward Jerusalem”. That is, they would not be windows like we have now, they did not open as windows, these windows apparently were always open toward Jerusalem, he had this kind of outlook. Jerusalem was not destroyed when Daniel was carried captive, it was not destroyed until some years afterwards due to the unfaithfulness of the king Zedekiah. So he would recall Jerusalem as he left it, and no doubt the house of God was intact, but his windows being open toward Jerusalem, that was his outlook, and it says, “he kneeled on his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God”.

That is, he had Jerusalem in mind, but then he knew his God, and that is a very important matter, he came before his God. They found no fault with him except in his relations with God, he was known as one who knew God. Now that is the most important thing we have, the knowledge of God. I remember a brother visiting another brother a few hours before he died, and his last words were, ‘The only thing we take with us is the knowledge of God’. How true that is! Daniel “kneeled on his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime”. He had been accustomed to praying to his God. And it says, “But those men came in a body, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God”. That is piety, knowing God, living in the fear of God, living consciously under the eye of God, that was the secret of Daniel’s course; why he refused the king’s delicate food; why he selected the pulse and water; how he was able to approach God with his companions, and then get the secret of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The secret was that he had a secret link with God. When I was young we used to hear often about soul history with God. We do not hear so much about it now, and that is a pity. Daniel had soul history with God and nothing replaces that, nothing makes up for it. I suppose our knowledge of God is really our measure. We know God by being close to Him, by speaking to Him, praying to Him, getting answers to our prayers, depending on Him. Daniel knew his God. Paul in the shipwreck said, “an angel of the God, whose I am and whom I serve”, Acts 27: 23. Can we all be like that, more and more alone with God, and get to know Him, as Daniel did?

No doubt he increased in this. He began faithfully as a noble, a prince of the land, not only naturally but morally; he appeared before his God, and his outlook was Jerusalem. All these seventy years, he must have been interested in Jerusalem, in all that was going on there. But then later on he understood by the books that the time was about to come for the accomplishment of the desolation of Jerusalem, and he was before his God in chapter 9 in humility, he represented what the nation ought to. This is one who knows God and his aspect is toward Jerusalem. I suppose Jerusalem for us would be God’s chief interest. We often say it is the assembly. Then the assembly abstractly is one thing, but we are living in times of public confusion, public fragmentation. I suppose Jerusalem would be for us, “let us go forth to him without the camp” (Heb 13: 13), it is where the Lord is, where the Spirit’s voice is heard and where the Lord’s rights are recognised, where God is rightly and suitably served. I suppose for us that would be Jerusalem; that is to be our chief interest, the centre of our interests, and to govern us in all our activities.

So may the Lord help us, especially in this matter of our knowledge of God, growing by the true knowledge of God and having this outlook. We often speak about the assembly abstractly, but then there is nothing for the Lord’s heart in what is abstract. What is for the Lord’s heart is in what is actual, in affection and reality. Let us be interested with our outlook toward what the Lord is doing at the present time. The Spirit is operating in order that the Spirit and the bride may say, Come. We are living in the last days of the dispensation, I am sure, when the Spirit is putting the finishing touches to the assembly. Let us have our outlook in that direction and increase in the knowledge of God, for the Lord’s Name’s sake.

**EDINBURGH**

**14th December 1993**

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# GOD’S MIND FOR MAN

**Matthew 1: 20, 21**

**Mark 1: 4-8**

**Luke 1: 76-79**

**John 1: 29**

I would like to tell you first of all what God has in mind, the kind of God He is and what He plans for mankind; that is for blessing. God has nothing else in mind for man but blessing, heavenly blessings. God made man, He created man, mankind is God’s design; God designed mankind in a special kind of way. And no one knows better than God what men need, what women need and what young people need; what mankind needs, no one knows better than God. The One who designed mankind, no one knows better than He how to make man happy, how to satisfy him, give him peace and joy; no one knows better than He. Now the enemy of our souls would tell us something different. God did not create man to be miserable, to be unhappy; God created man in view of making him happy, in view of making him a satisfied person. God made mankind with a certain capacity, with a mind that could think, able to reason, able to understand—and not only able to understand, but to communicate his mind with the power of speech. We need to understand that man is a special creation. Genesis 1 tells us that, that man was created and God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”, v 7. God has given us of His spirit. I suppose in some sense we receive our bodies from our parents, but we do not receive our spirits from our parents, we receive our spirits from God; the spirit returns unto God who gave it, Eccl 12: 7. That is the kind of being that man is: he consists of spirit, soul and body: the only creature that consists of spirit, soul and body is mankind. Do not listen to so-called scientists who speak about evolution; ridiculous theory that it was: man is a special creation of God, I say again, consisting of spirit, soul and body. And every one gets his or her spirit from God. Now, I say again that no one knows better than God how to satisfy that being, man, that He especially made: no one knows better than God how to fill his heart and give him joy and satisfaction.

In the Old Testament, there were various promises that God made to mankind, and some of these are fulfilled—the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, and the gift of the Holy Spirit: these were promises in the Old Testament which are fulfilled. There are certain promises which are not fulfilled: the Lord is coming to settle His kingdom publicly; that is not yet fulfilled, but there are some promises which are fulfilled. There are God’s promises, but there is also God’s purpose: it was “hidden throughout the ages in God” (Eph 3: 9), long before Christianity, but is what God has in mind for mankind, what He purposed before the world’s foundation is now made known. It was “hidden throughout the ages in God”, but is now made known, made manifest. I just what to give you some idea of the kind of God with whom we have to do. He has a kingdom, for instance; not yet established publicly, but he has a kingdom here consisting of believers who have the Holy Spirit who know the potential of the kingdom, who know the blessing of being subject to the Lord Jesus Christ, being here for His will. That is a wonderful blessing that God offers in His kingdom, not yet established publicly, but it exists actually and some of us can be at peace about it, that the kingdom of God exists now in persons who are subject to our Lord Jesus Christ. God has in mind a family, that mankind should come into His family: these are all objectives that God has set in the glad tidings. He would give a place in the family. It is not an earthly family, He is not giving men earthly prospects, he has given what is far greater—heavenly prospects. He is forming a heavenly family which will be for His pleasure now and eternally. God has in mind a family, a family of sons. He is forming now a counterpart for the Lord Jesus Christ, the assembly. The assembly for the heart of Christ was a matter “hidden throughout the ages in God” but is now made known, made manifest. I am just trying to give you some impression of what God has in mind for men, women and young people.

Now there is one obstacle: why are all not enjoying what God has in mind? There is one obstacle, and that is sin, our sins. That is one obstacle that came in early in Genesis 3, the enemy of our souls operating and sowing doubt in Eve, and bringing in distance, lack of confidence, lack of trust in God. He has instilled this matter of sin and sins; it is the one obstacle that prevents all men entering into the blessing that God had in mind. God does not ask you, does not ask anyone, to solve that problem. He did it Himself. God has solved that great problem of sin; that one obstacle, God has removed it; and that brings me to the scriptures I have read.

It says in Matthew, “thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins”. This Babe was God coming in Himself; God undertook to settle this great problem: to remove this great obstacle, God Himself undertook to do so in the Person of Jesus. Godhead glory is His, the majesty of Deity is His; but He came to this earth as a Babe—wonderful to contemplate the fact! We speak of feeding on Christ; in fact most of what is in the gospels is about three-and-a-half years of the service of the Lord Jesus. From the manger to the cross we can understand, but from the glory to the manger is beyond our understanding, beyond our fathoming; that God Himself should come so low, so near to men. Did you ever hear of anyone who was frightened of Jesus when He was here? That was God’s approach to man, as a Babe, and growing up in a household—perhaps He had four brothers and at least two sisters; He lived with them, I suppose. Thirty years of private life; how Jesus lived in the household I often wonder, but He was there in perfection, God was there. It says here, “thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins”. That is why Jesus came here, to remove this great obstacle which prevented mankind from enjoying the blessing that God had in mind, God Himself undertook to remove that obstacle. And here He is presented, to “save his people from their sins”.

First of all, He is able to save us from the consequences of our sins: the consequences of our sins mean judgment, if our sins are unsettled. It is a very solemn thing if the matter of our sins is not a settled matter. It will mean judgment, it will mean eternal loss, eternal damnation—a fearful fact. He has come to save us from the consequences of our sins. That is a very great matter to understand. But it is not only to save us from the consequences of our sins, but to save us from our sins; to save us from going on a self-willed way, from a course of sin, into submission to the Lord Jesus, into committal to the will of God. It is to save us from a sinful course, to save us in view of the pleasure of God, and our own joy and satisfaction—to “save his people from their sins”. That is why Jesus came: “Christ Jesus came into the world”—why?—“to save sinners”, 1 Tim 1: 15. Think of this obstacle of sins that God Himself has removed by coming in the Person of the Lord Jesus, to save His people from the consequences of their sins and to save them from a sinful course.

Now Mark tells us how that comes about, that is God’s attitude, what is available. God has come and undertaken the work necessary to save us from our sins. It meant of course the Lord Jesus taking the sinner’s place; you think of His stoop into Manhood, and think of His stoop not death. Think of that stoop, in taking the sinner’s place; as we sang—

Dying in the sinner’s stead

(Hymn 414).

That is what the end of Matthew’s gospel tells us about: the Lord cried: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Matt 27: 46. We can never fathom what that means. There are some things we can feed upon and contemplate, but there are some things we can never fathom. I say, from the glory to the manger we can never fathom; what it meant for Jesus to be the sin-bearer we can never fathom. I suppose we never will fathom what it was for Him to be made sin, all that was necessary that He was to save His people from their sins. That work has been accomplished: God does not ask us to do anything of that work. It is finished. The obstacle, as far as God is concerned, has been removed.

It needs to be removed from our side, and this scripture in Mark tells us how. It says, “There came John baptising in the wilderness, and preaching the baptism of repentance”. How do we come into it? By means of repentance. It goes on, “for remission of sins”, the sin question, the great obstacle settled, sins remitted now and eternally; never to rise again here, never to rise in the hereafter. Remission of sins comes by way of repentance. Now repentance is a deep work, it is not just a light thing. It is not just a mental exercise, repentance is a heart matter, involving the whole being indeed. It means that we come to the same judgment about our sins that God has, and that gives us an appreciation of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, an appreciation of the one who did the work. So we come into it by means of “repentance for remission of sins”. We know that this is a settled matter: it is “repentance towards God”—He is the One we repent to, He is the One who has been offended—and then, “faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ”, Acts 20: 21. It is simple to present and most important, but I just point the need for repentance and depth of repentance, to have the same judgment of our sins as God has, which cost the Lord Jesus such infinite, untold suffering. It gives us a fresh appreciation of our Lord Jesus Christ—“repentance for remission of sins”. It says, “And there went out to him all the district of Judæa, and all they of Jerusalem, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins”—confessing their sins. That is, they owned that they were sinners and that they needed forgiveness. They confessed their sins. I suppose that was only a beginning in a sense, they confessed their sins. We need to live that way, confessing our sins, confessing to God. We might begin that way, repenting towards God, but then we are to be repenting persons, confessing our sins, and that gives us a clear conscience before God. All our sins are out before God, confessing our sins. That is what happened here, and it goes on to speak about the gift of the Holy Spirit. It says, “he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit”. Now this is how we come into it. Matthew presents One who will save His people from their sins, and Mark shows us how it comes about, by means of “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ”; and then confessing our sins, having everything out before God. We were speaking this afternoon about that woman in John 4 who said, “Come, see a man who told me all things I had ever done”, John 4: 29. Everything was out, everything was out before the Lord Jesus, before God; she had nothing on her conscience. What a happy position to be in, dear friend, to have nothing on your conscience. Have you anything on your conscience? If you have, confess. There is no other way: the Lord Jesus is available, He came to save His people from their sins, and He is the way into it. The result is: “I indeed have baptised you with water, but he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit”, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Two things are presented in the gospel especially, that is remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have everything in these two wonderful blessings that God had in mind for us.

It is quite remarkable how in the introduction to each of the gospels, we have this matter of sins coming up; and you can proceed to enjoy the rest of these chapters in the gospels by knowing that the sin matter is settled. And so we have here this touch in Luke’s gospel: “to make ready his ways; to give knowledge of deliverance to his people by the remission of their sins”. We have that knowledge, we have that consciousness by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the knowledge of our sins forgiven. It comes by faith, but the enjoyment of it, the consciousness of it, comes by the gift of the Holy Spirit. It says, “on account of the bowels of mercy of our God”; that is a wonderful expression. I would not have written this, I would not speak about the bowels of God, but Luke does, “the bowels of mercy of our God”. It is the inwards of God going out to the sinner, providing for the sinner, removing the obstacle that what God has in mind might be available to all, “on account of the bowels of mercy of our God”—wonderful expression, wonderful depths of the love and the feelings of God. It says, “to shine upon them who were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”. How fine to have our feet guided into the way of peace! It is part of God’s thought for us—“in the way of peace”. It is not the way of disturbance, not the way of anxiety, but the way of peace: “peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5: 1); peace of the conscience, peace of the heart, having an object for our affections in the Lord Jesus personally. It is a fine expression: “to guide our feet into the way of peace”. There is not much peace in this world, not much restfulness, but God’s thought is that we should come into this way of peace. May it be so for every one us: our feet guided into the way of peace. It is the way of the knowledge of God, understanding the feelings of God, “the bowels of mercy of our God”. The Spirit would guide our feet in the way of peace.

And so in John, we have a reference to the sin of the world; that is, John the baptist says “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”. What an undertaking! The Lord Jesus suffered, not only that your sin might be dealt with, but that sin might be removed entirely from the universe. What an undertaking: “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”. It is not only the work, it is the One who does it—the taker away of the sin of the world. That is going to come to pass: He has laid the foundation in righteousness in His sufferings on the cross, and our sins can be remitted—every one here, our sins can be remitted by repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and we can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit; but this is a mighty undertaking: “takes away the sin of the world”. There is going to be a world that God has in mind where there will not be a vestige of sin. Sin will be confined to its own place. It is called a lake, it has confines. It is an awful thing to be there of course, an awful thing to be in these confines; but the Lord Jesus, the One who suffered on the cross, the Lamb of God, the One who was God’s sacrifice when a foundation was laid in righteousness, He is going to undertake to take away the sin of the world. That will be by judgment of course the book of Revelation tells us that. There is a world to come in which He will be pre-eminent, and have the first place in all things publicly; and beside that there will be an eternal order of things without sin.

Well now, will you fit in there, dear friend? How can you fit into an eternal scene of things where there is no sin, no self-pleasing, all for the pleasure of God, all for the satisfaction of God? Will we be satisfied? Of course, we will be satisfied, but all will be for the pleasure and satisfaction of God Himself. All sin removed; again I say, no self-will, no self-pleasing, all done away—will you fit in? Do you still like to please yourself, do you still like your own will? You cannot fit here if that is so. We need to commit ourselves to the will of God and come into His kingdom, belong to His family, come into these great thoughts of God, heavenly thoughts. But I just impress you with this great undertaking: “who takes away the sin of the world”. There has got to be a universe of bliss in which there will not be a vestige of sin, or self-will, or self-pleasing. I say again, would you like to be there? You will not have your own will. I suppose some of us have come to it that we would fit there; I trust that we would all fit there. The preparation takes place now, for this universe of bliss. It is much more than the world to come. The Lord Jesus will be prominent, He will be in the first place, He will be pre-eminent in the world to come; but after that there is a point where God is “all in all” (1 Cor 15: 28), God pervades. Everything is pleasing to Him, everything is after His own mind. It is a wonderful order of things. I would like you to think about that and be ready for that, and judge self-will and self-pleasing—it comes so natural to us, we have all been infected with the poison of the enemy and it belongs to our very nature according to the flesh; but you think of an order of things where there is no evidence of any self-pleasing but all is for the pleasure and the glory of God.

May we all be ready for it, for the Lord’s own sake.

**EDINBURGH**

*This piece and the next three were taken from recordings that carry no indication of the date of the meeting.*

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# THE LORD’S RESORT

**John 10: 39-42; 11: 53-54**

I would just like to say a few words about the Lord's movements in this gospel. They are very interesting movements. He was found mostly in Judaea in the gospel of John. In the other gospels He was largely found in Galilee, His teaching takes place in Galilee; but Judæa is the place where the Lord spent most of His time according to this gospel. In fact it may be that when chapter 4: 44 says, “for Jesus himself bore witness that a prophet has no honour in his own country”; that may refer to Judæa as far as I can see. He goes up to Judæa (chap 3: 22) and back to Galilee in chapter 4; and so on, but it is these movements in these two chapters that I have been interested in. He finds Himself in opposition. In fact, in most of the chapters in John, the Lord's teaching is an area of intense opposition. He speaks about the Father, He speaks about gems that we appreciate to an audience that did not appreciate them. They oppose Him. They say He had a devil, and so on, and yet He continues to teach and to speak to them with patience. But here it says in chapter 10, “and he went away from out of their hand and departed again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptising at the first”. Now that refers to chapter 1 of this gospel, where John was baptising in Bethany across the Jordan, and in that setting the Lord is pre-eminent, there is no rival. We have John the baptist's testimony regarding Him: he says, “I am not the Christ”. He denies any prominence, any importance. He calls attention to the Lord Jesus, that is where John was baptising at the first.

In chapter 3 John is found again baptising but not in the same place; and there is a reasoning there. There is reasoning and there is not the same prominence given to the Lord Jesus. John the baptist has to oppose suggestions that are made in chapter 3; but it is in chapter 1 where there is no rival to the Lord Jesus. His pre-eminence is in John the baptist’s mind. He gives testimony. He negates himself entirely and calls attention to Christ. That is what John was looking at “at the first”, and that is where the Lord resorts to in this chapter 10. That is where we will find the Lord today. We will find Him in a place where He is referred to, where there is no rival to Him, where He is pre-eminent; and we would desire to provide an atmosphere like that for the Lord to come to. Think of the opposition at the present time and all the imitation publicly, all that kind of thing. This thought therefore applies, that He “went away from out of their hand and departed again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptising at the first”; that is, where the Lord had His place of supremacy, where there was no rival to Him. It says, “he abode there”; “And many came to him”. They came to Him where He was in this place. “And many came to him, and said, John did no sign; but all things which John said of this man were true.” Well that all refers to chapter 1: all that John had said about Him was true, all the testimony he bore was true. He did no sign – he had left the Lord to do signs. And it says here: “And many believed on him there.”

So in chapter 11 there is again opposition. In chapter 8 they took up stones to cast at Him, and also in chapter 10 they took up stones to cast at Him; and now in chapter 11 “they took counsel that they might kill him. Jesus therefore walked no longer openly among the Jews, but went away thence into the country near the desert, to a city called Ephraim”. You might say He went outside the camp, He went into this place of seclusion. He walked no more openly among the Jews but went thence into the country, near the desert, away from the crowd, away from the public eye altogether. He had testified faithfully to the Pharisees, but now He retires; and He “went away thence into the country near the desert to a city called Ephraim”. It is not a place that is easily found. You would have to be exercised to find Him in this place. It says, “and there he sojourned with the disciples”. They were with Him, but He was found in this country near the desert. It suggests seclusion, away from the public eye. We desire to know something of where the Lord can be apart from what is public and all the opposition, where He can be restful. It says, “and there he sojourned with his disciples”. And you see there are questions raised as to where He is, would He come to the feast, and so on. It is His disciples, those who are committed to Him, those who have Him in their hearts in a pre-eminent way, who know where He is. It says in the next chapter that He came to Bethany. He comes from this place of seclusion to Bethany, to a locality, but it is the place of seclusion, away from the public eye, as I have said, away from the opposition; and all the irritation, all that kind of thing, and we would desire to be where He is where He sojourned with His disciples.

I do not have much more to say, but it was just to refer to these two places where the Lord resorted, where He was with His disciples, where He could be found, apart from what is public but where He was at home, shall we say? Of course, in chapter 1 He had a home and two of the disciples saw where He abode. In chapter 8, when others went to their own homes, He went to the Mount of Olives. He had His own place of seclusion with the Father, but here in chapter 11 He sojourned with His disciples, in the secret of the Lord's own relations with His Father, you may say a heavenly level of things, and there He abode with His disciples.

Well, may the Lord encourage us! For His Name's sake.

**EDINBURGH**

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# THE WELL AND THE CAMELS

**Genesis 24: 13, 15-18, 62, 63**

This chapter has been used for profit over the years, especially as to the servant. I know that the servant is typical of the Holy Spirit, but I would like to speak about other things here that are typical of the Holy Spirit—the well and the camels. Rebecca was not the product of the servant; Rebecca was the product of the well, because the servant found her. The servant is typical of the Spirit personally, as presented in John 14, 15 and 16, especially chapter 16, as sent out with a purpose; whereas the well suggests the Spirit more as resource to be drawn upon. The well was available, but Rebecca had to commit herself to draw from the well. It was her action, her initiative, and that is so important as far as I can see. The servant found Rebecca at the well, where he expected to find such a person. It says that he came to the city “at the time of the evening, when the women came out to draw water”. He expected and he found Rebecca there, because of drawing from the well, to take advantage and get the benefit of the resource that was there in the well. So for us, the Holy Spirit is always available, but it is a matter of applying ourselves and drawing from Him. It is more this side, as far as I can see: the servant is more the Spirit personally; the well is more like living by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit (Gal 5: 25), and sowing to the Spirit, Gal 6: 8. It is what we do, it is what Rebecca did, what she committed herself to, and no doubt was consistent in. She lived through the well, she came every evening to draw water; water was needed for refreshment and for drinking, and also for cleansing, for washing. That was her application, and it formed a constitution, a spiritual constitution. And that I believe is how we form a spiritual constitution by drawing from the Holy Spirit as available to us as a constant unfailing resource to be drawn upon and to live and walk by: doing things by the Spirit—Paul speaks about that: “if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body”, Rom 8: 13. It is making use of the power of the Spirit to be formed in a certain character as Rebecca was. And she became available to the servant, as the Spirit personally, to be taken to Isaac. I wanted to emphasise the importance of the well, as underlying Rebecca’s character. She “was very fair in countenance; a virgin”, and so on, but that is because she lived daily drawing from the Spirit as resource. So we become available to the Spirit, and available to Isaac, that is to the Lord Jesus Christ for His pleasure.

Now that is one side of the matter; the other side is the camels. This is the power to move: “And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master” (v 10), enough camels to bring the servant and his men to Rebecca, and enough camels to take the servant and his men, and Rebecca and her maids back. The same power that brought the servant to the well is the same power that carried Rebecca to Isaac. It says where we read that “Isaac had gone out to meditate in the fields toward the beginning of evening”—to meditate, there is a vacancy in the heart of Isaac which Rebecca was going to fill. Rebecca’s name means ‘captivating’ and we see in the verses we have read that through the servant’s leading, she is captivated by Isaac; and Isaac is captivated by Rebecca. What Isaac saw was the camels coming, in other words, the power to carry Rebecca and her maidens to this place. “Isaac had gone out to meditate in the fields toward the beginning of evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, camels were coming”. We need the Spirit as carrying power. It says, “in order that he may give you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man”, Eph 3: 16. Rebecca represents the “inner man” but “strengthened with power”: how important the power of the Spirit is to be carried all the way to Isaac. Now of course, Rebecca is typical of the assembly, but she also represents the personnel. So that we are those who come to the well, to be strengthened by the Spirit; and then this power to transport. Attention has recently been drawn to 1 Chronicles 15: 22, where the footnote says that the music speaks of transport; it is this power to be carried, and for that we depend on the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord help us in these things, for His Name’s sake.

**EDINBURGH**

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# GATES LIFTED UP

**Psalms 24: 7-10**

**Luke 12: 34-36**

I just wanted to link on with our brother’s opening prayer, speaking of the Lord going into heaven, and the reception He had, and indeed that He might be received into our hearts. The verses read in this Psalm show what is spontaneous: the gates lift themselves up, the everlasting doors lift themselves up. It is a spontaneous matter; it is not an arduous matter, it is not creaking gates. They are gates that respond immediately, and that was so when the Lord Jesus entered into heaven. Think of Him “mighty in battle”; think of the mighty Victor entering into the courts of heaven—wonderful! Think of the acclamation! It says He was “carried up into heaven” (Luke 24: 51): think of the appreciation of our Lord Jesus Christ as He enters into heaven. Think of the Father saying to Him, “Sit at my right hand, until I put thine enemies as footstool of thy feet”, Ps 110: 1. He is still awaiting that moment, and for two thousand years, the preaching of the glad tidings creates an opportunity for repentant sinners; a wonderful result from the Lord entering in! He says to the overcomer, “as *I* also have overcome, and have sat down with my Father in his throne”, Rev 3: 21. I am just speaking of the reception which the Lord Jesus had on entering into heaven.

But then He is going to come publicly, and this Psalm would also suggest His entrance into Jerusalem publicly, the acclamation. There will be souls there ready to receive Him. He will be strong, He will remove every obstacle, He will bring in conditions of eternal life on the earth for a thousand years. Think of the acclamation He will receive! Think of the spontaneity; those who are ready, after all the suffering, they will receive the King of glory. The gates will be lifted up, it is something spontaneous; it will not be difficult or a prolonged matter. It will be an immediate matter, the Lord received into Jerusalem in the coming day.

And then, as our brother prayed, we need to have the Lord in our hearts—received into our hearts, into our affections, into our lives now. The gospel would have that in view, that there might be a place for the Lord Jesus Christ in our minds, in our affections, in our practical lives. The King of glory might have His place now, anticipating that public day; how important it is that there should be something in our hearts in response to the presentation of the Lord Jesus, something spontaneous rising. The gates open themselves to let the Lord into our affections.

There is a more testing matter, which is why I read this scripture in Luke 12: “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. Let your loins be girded about, and lamps burning; and *ye* like men who wait their own lord”. Whenever we come together for our meetings—for a meeting of this character—there should be an immediate response to the Lord, in order that He should have His place—especially in our reading meetings, I think. I find this a great test. We are generally well-instructed, we can say right things, and that in itself may be instructive; but it is not what this scripture requires. He would have His own active in expectancy. Of course, we look for the Lord to come for us at the rapture; that is one thing. But this scripture appears to refer not to the eventual coming at the rapture, but the Lord coming to us on occasions like those when we read the Scriptures. It says, “if he come in the second watch, and come in the third watch”, v 38. It is “and”; it means He might come more than once, it seems to me. It would be to govern us when we gather together, to come to any occasion. We are accustomed to the Lord coming in among us at the Supper; but it should be the same outlook at other occasions, and it tests us: “your loins be girded about, and lamps burning”. We are to be on the alert for some indication of His coming into the occasion: “Let your loins be girded about, and lamps burning; and *ye* like men who wait their own lord”. We are to be that kind of person; “when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately”.

Well, I mention this as it is a test. The more we know and the more we have read, it may be that this is somewhat excluded. The Lord’s touch is so living and so important to our comings together: “when he comes and knocks”. You see, we may be so busy that when He knocks we do not hear: “when he comes and knocks, they may open to him immediately”. This is the vital thing, that when He knocks, they open to Him immediately.

May the Lord help us in exercise that this may be a more real matter among us, for His own Name’s sake.

**EDINBURGH**