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"I ASCEND"

John 20: 17

PAG I want to draw attention particularly to the word "ascend". The Lord says, "I ascend". The world around is constantly going down and it will end in judgment. The place of the believer is on high, and the more we appreciate what is heavenly and eternal, the more we come to have a judgment of the world and the way it is headed.

We may think that the world is different now from what it was, but we know from the Old Testament that the heart of man after the flesh "is deceitful above all things, and incurable", Jer 17: 9. The heart of man is no different from what it was when Jeremiah wrote, although its wickedness may seem more visible in some ways. That is all I am going to say about that, because I have in mind that we should be encouraged that there is One who had the right to say, "I ascend", and that His desire is to take us with Him.

I was particularly thinking about the service of praise - although I would not restrict us to that - where the thought is that we should be on the line of what is ascending to divine Persons. It says in the end of Luke that "he led them out as far as Bethany", Luke 24: 50. So there is a certain movement that begins on earth, but thereafter He is received up. As assembling to break bread, we gather on earth. Then what is in view is what is ascending.

The word for the burnt offering in Leviticus 1 in the original Hebrew (*ôlâh*) means 'to cause to ascend'. The thought is that things should be ascending to God. It is striking that the burnt offering is for God. It includes, of course, the matter of atonement. But neither the priest nor the offerer eats the burnt offering; it is distinctively for God. So what is for God is always on the line of ascending, and it is also what comes first; the burnt offering comes first. The burnt offering, as speaking particularly of what Christ is to God, is distinctive among the offerings. I am exercised that we should get help together in relation to this thought of ascending, so that we might be encouraged that as Christ has a heavenly place, so also our place is heavenly.

NJH On the mount of transfiguration He was saluted by the excellent glory; He ever had a right to His heavenly place. Do you think this is a special occasion here, because the work is now complete?

PAG So we see Him on the mount of transfiguration: He would have

had that right, but Peter and James and John could not have gone, because the work was not complete. But now He can say, "my Father and your Father … my God and your God". He has in mind to take us with Him.

NJH Ascending up above all heavens involves place, but here He ascends to a Person.

PAG He ascends to "my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God". Does this involve the convergence of Christ's rights in relation to who He was, His personal greatness on the one hand, and on the other God's purpose that Christ should come in as Man, and that He should gather up those who were with Him? In Christ, God's rights and God's purpose converge to bring a great result. And it is a result that is for God.

NJH This is really the fruit of revelation; it is the Person who is revealed. "I ascend to my Father and your Father" - it is the Person who is revealed. It brings that whole matter so close to us.

PAG Yes, there was a declaration of God in a general way, but then there was the revelation of God in Christ to those who were able to take it in: "He that has seen me has seen the Father", John 14: 9. Revelation includes the thought that there is capacity to receive the revelation to take it on. It is by the gift of the Spirit that we have capacity to take on what Christ has revealed.

WMP "He that descended is the same who has also ascended … that he might fill all things", Eph 4: 10. What we have in John 20 seems to be more the thought of ascending in connection with relationships. Is this more John's side of love?

PAG It is my impression that "He that descended" could be a title of Christ. He descended in love. It was also an act of love on His part to ascend that He might fill all things. But here the stress is on not just what He did, but on what He would bring with Him. In Ephesians, it records that God "has raised us up together, and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus", Eph 2: 6. "Together" is a characteristic word of Ephesians. We come into it individually, of course, but the enjoyment of "my Father and your Father … my God and your God" is a collective enjoyment; it is something we enjoy together. And "together" would involve love.

NJH Could we have the service of God without this?

PAG It would be incomplete. We may come and simply think about the Lord, and I would respect and honour that. But (since we have mentioned Ephesians), I do not think we can really depart now from what we know, that through Christ and by one Spirit we have access to the Father, Eph 2: 18.

As we have also been taught, to come to the worship of God as revealed is not a higher thought. The Father is supreme in the economy. But there is a wider thought embracing the revelation of God in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This thought in the service of God is illustrated in Psalm 51. In the last verse of the psalm we have -

> Then shalt thou have sacrifices of righteousness, burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering, v 19.

The thought of a whole burnt-offering would encompass all that Christ has revealed in God. You would not miss something out, would you?

NJH Is it not in the heart of Christ when He comes in at the Supper to go right through to God? That is His object - the Father and God.

PAG Yes, very much so. And there are touches of it elsewhere. Luke is the priestly gospel. We often think of Luke 15 as representing the outgoing of the gospel from the house of God, and that is right. Luke 14 and 15 refer to the house of God and the gospel going out. But what you also get in Luke 15 is a suggestion as to the order of the service, because first there is the man that goes after the lost sheep, speaking of Christ, and then there is the woman that speaks of the Spirit, and then there is the Father. As I say, it is not the Father's house as we have it in John 14. It is the house of God, but still, you get a sense that in order for the matter to be complete there is the man (Christ) and the woman (the Spirit), and then the Father and it would not be complete without that.

AJH The Lord says in His prayer to the Father in John 17, “I have made known to them thy name, and will make it known”, v 26. He has done that. Is this more than that, because this is relationship?

PAG That is helpful. Scripture suggests that He made known to them the Father's name when He was here: “He that has seen me has seen the Father”. That is what they saw here. But “will make it known” is what He was doing here; there is a fulness here in John 20. He had not said before this, “my Father and your Father … my God and your God”. This is making it known in a fuller way. That is what He is doing

every Lord's day, making that Name known so that we might respond to it. The Lord always acts purposefully. If He is making the Father's name known, it is for a purpose, and I think the purpose is that it should be responded to.

TRC "Go to my brethren"; I am thinking of your remark as to "together". It is a company that the Lord has secured on the other side of death. This message was not given to just disciples - it was to His brethren.

PAG That is helpful. He is the Sanctifier, "and those sanctified are all of one", Heb 2: 11. So they are all of one source. And Christ, as Man, had His source in God. "For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" is clearly widening it out to include not only the Hebrew saints to whom it was written, but really to all.

It is helpful to bring that into the thought of ascending. "Brethren" is a dignified thought. We do not come to something, and then have to say, perhaps I am not suitable for the place. We can come to it with an understanding, not that I have made myself suitable, but that He is the Sanctifier. We are the sanctified, and there is suitability there.

TRC The Lord said, "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but do ye remain in the city till ye be clothed with power from on high", Luke 24: 49. Is that the power to ascend?

PAG Very good. And the fact that He distinguishes where the power is from, it is from "on high". Well, that must mean that "on high" is in view.

CAS You have referred to Luke a number of times. It says there that He was carried up, and here in John it is, "I ascend". These are wonderful distinctions. Does John have the glory of the Person in mind? For example, in John 18 when Jesus says, "I am he, they went away backward", v 6. John brings in these thoughts.

PAG Yes, Luke brings out the side of His reception - "whom heaven indeed must receive", Acts 3: 21. John brings out His right to ascend. Both are true; He is received and it is righteous that He should be, but He has the right to ascend. By way of a very clear distinction, Lucifer said, "I will ascend", Isa 14: 13. But the Lord says, "I ascend". It was an act of will on the part of Satan; it was an act of power on the part of the Lord.

CJMcK. In Song of Songs we have the question -

> Who is this, she that cometh up from the wilderness
> Like pillars of smoke … ? chap 3: 6

Could that be applied to the assembly? The ascending line coming up from the wilderness, and then the pillars of smoke? Smoke would be an allusion to the Old Testament sacrifice that was going up to God?

PAG I think so. She is leaning on her beloved; she is not doing this alone. I like your reference to the sacrifices. Each time there is a response in the service of praise, it is like a pillar of smoke. And where is it going? It is going up.

There is a great deal in scripture that we can very happily and rightly apply to ourselves. My exercise is that it is important to be occupied at the service of praise with what is for divine Persons. We are not occupied with our daily need or with thanks for forgiveness of sins. We are occupied with what would rise up to satisfy. Ascending also comes into the Old Testament is in relation to the lamp, the light, Exod 25: 37, note. The light ascends when the lamp is lit; it is 'caused to ascend'. There is light, you might say, arising in fragrance to God. There is a place where there is room for the light to shine, and God has been gratified by that.

TRC In the Song of Songs there is a reference to the spouse saying -

> My beloved spake and said unto me,
> Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away chap 2: 10.

It is never intended that the assembly should be held by anything here, and the Lord's appeal is to -

> Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Is that an ascending line?

PAG That is very good. In relation to not being held by anything here, the appeal of love is -

> Come with me …
>
> Come, look from the top of Amanah,
> From the top of Senir and Hermon,
> From the lions' dens,
> From the mountains of the leopards chap 4: 8.

He does not say, look at the lion's dens and the mountains of the leopards. We may think of these as applying to the things that are contrary and adverse and might cause harm and difficulty. He says, 'Look *from* them. You are at the top of the mountain now, do not look back'. It is not that we ignore the scene of responsibility. But there is a time when we can be abstracted from it and we are not occupied with what is negative and adverse because, when we come to what is eternal, all that is negative and adverse will be gone.

WMP At what point do we begin on this ascending line?

PAG One thing I would have to accept is that you might be conscious of it before I am. So I would not say that the Lord comes in at a specific moment; it is a matter for Him, but His desire is to come. What I would say is that if we have a desire to be formed in what is spiritual, we would recognise it. And I think we should recognise it quickly. In John 20, Mary took a moment or two. She had to be adjusted, but when she was, she grasped who was there. Now I might be slow, and there might be a sister has recognised it before any brother has. That is why the collective is so important, because we get the benefit of what the Spirit is giving to each one.

NJH I was thinking earlier today that “the Spirit and the bride say, Come”, Rev 22: 17. The Spirit knows that she is ready for that. Is that not important? In the service of God we are made ready for it?

PAG I do think that. We have been taught as to the order of the service of God, but it is not to suggest that the Spirit is not there from the beginning. There is a moment when the Lord directs the attention of the assembly specifically towards the Spirit. But it is not as though the Spirit only appears at that moment; the Holy Spirit has been there all the time. Indeed, if we are seeking to be right as to matters, the Spirit would be with us in that sense, all the time. And as we come up, you could not really assemble apart from the power of the Spirit, could you?

NJH I think what you said helps. It was a spiritual occasion which they were to be ready for, and that is a great thing. I recall a sister to whom someone said, 'The Lord came this morning', and she asked, 'What did He say?'. He will not come in and be silent; He will convey something of His mind for the moment.

PAG Well, that is good. I got an impression this morning, from the brother giving thanks for the emblems. He spoke about the Lord's

words being fresh. That stayed with me. Jesus said, 'This do for a calling of me to mind', 1 Cor 11: 24 note. But that was not only for two thousand years ago; that word remains fresh.

AJH Do you not think it starts at your house, before you come out? It is “from glory to glory”, 2 Cor 3: 18.

PAG Very much so. Broadly speaking, there are three settings in the teaching of the tabernacle system in the Old Testament. There is the holy of holies: that is where the ark was behind the curtain; and then there is the holy place, which would be the tabernacle within the court; and then there is a clean place: we have been taught that would be the houses of the saints. If you look at Leviticus 10 - and I know failure had come in there - they were given of the offerings to eat in a clean place. So the houses of the saints were to be consistent with the holy place and with the holy of holies. These three are distinct, in that sense, but they are not separate. And so the preparation in our houses contributes to what goes forward. Mr Taylor said (vol 73 p493) that, as he was getting ready for the Supper, he was thinking about the brethren getting into their cars and coming to the meeting. He already had the sense in his heart that they were all coming to the same place.

PJM Is there help for us in seeing that the disciples who saw the Lord going up went into the city and up to the upper chamber, Acts 1: 12? “I ascend” is the authority of His movements, but the men of Galilee were directed to the upper room.

PAG “I ascend” gives the Lord His distinctive place, but it is an ascension that attracts; it draws us with Him. He went to God; that was His object. Well, He is our object. So we go with Him where He is. What you say is right, as to the upper chamber. And then there is also, later on, the thought of the upper districts, chap 19: 1. There is an area of things where divine work is proceeding and where divine interests are maintained.

PJM The thought of the odour of the incense was mentioned earlier. “These gave themselves all with one accord to continual prayer”, Acts 1: 14. That would be the heavenly line of activity, would it not?

PAG Mr Darby says,

> Grateful incense this, ascending
> Ever to the Father's throne (Hymn 14).

We are thinking particularly of the service of praise, but it is not that there is no fragrance, no incense, in the course of the responsible week. It is not something that happens for an hour and then that is it finished. As was mentioned in the opening prayer, we carry forward what has been enjoyed in the morning and it affects us for the rest of the day. If it affects us, think of what it means to God.

CAS In Acts 20 Paul had descended, but it says there, "having gone up, and having broken the bread", Acts 20: 11. So Paul was going up before they broke bread, he had that in his mind to be on an ascending line.

PAG Yes, and they had in mind to take Eutychus with them. Man's day starts in the morning and ends in the evening. God's day starts in the evening and ends in the morning. The descending is first; the sun going down is first; the sun rising is what concludes the day. Man's world is not just contrary to God's world; it is often opposite to it. Man's will is to ascend. That has been embedded in the will of man, to assert themselves, to insist on rights. All my rights went at the cross, and God's rights prevailed.

JN I was thinking of elevation, and what was said about being brought into the upper room. It is what is for God, is it not?

PAG That is good. Solomon had an ascent by which he went up, 1 Kings 10: 5. It could be taken account of. It was not just something that he did himself and no one else could see it, but he had an ascent by which he went up. God's thought for the saints is spiritual and moral elevation. That is what He has in mind, and that is available in the power of the Spirit through the work of Christ. It is striking even as to the resurrection of Christ, it says that He "has been raised **up** from **among** the dead", Rom 6: 4. It would be sufficient to say He was raised. But scripture says He was raised *up* from among the dead. And what we have quoted from Ephesians 2: 6 is that God "has raised us **up** together". The thought of *up* is prominent.

WMP We begin at the Supper primarily with the thought of the will of God, the One who did that will in perfection. But as we proceed, we move into the purpose of His love. Does that connect with your thought as to what is involved in the ascending line?

PAG It does, because the purpose of His love was to find an answer to His love. It works out in a system of glory. In 1 Corinthians 10, the

cup is first and then the loaf. The cup is the public side, where the rights of God must be paramount, but then when we come into the side of privilege, it is the loaf that is first, chap 11. That is Christ's body and what is secured as a result of that giving. And then it is the cup, which is the new covenant. Christ is the Minister of the new covenant, and a covenant in that setting suggests relationships established in righteousness. So what are these relationships, but relationships of love? And why is He the mediator of it? It is because He knows that love the best, and brings us into it. Although our first occupation is to remember the Lord, the new covenant is already reminding us that the heart of God lies behind all this. So even the Supper itself is lifting us up. It is lifting us up out of our circumstances.

GJH In John 17 we have the Lord's desires. Before that, He had spoken to His Father, that they may know that "the glory which thou has given me I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me", John 17: 22. It was always the Lord's thought that He would take us into that sphere. Is He in reality establishing that in John 20: 17? Is it something to take in, that it has always been the Lord's thoughts, that we should enjoy this?

PAG We also have in John 17, "the men whom thou gavest me out of the world", v 6. If we are given out of somewhere, we must be going somewhere else. He did not say, 'the men thou gavest me *in* the world'. He says, "thou gavest me **out** of the world". And then, "the glory which thou has given me I have given them". So He is taking us out of the world into a place of privilege. The glory referred to has in view the glory of sonship; so He is making us suitable for that place of privilege. And then He is telling us that what marks that place of privilege is oneness; "that they may be one, as we are one".

It was said to me that, particularly in times of difficulty, we should make sure that we listen to a brother's part in the service of God, because we will see him at his best there. I believe that *being one* involves seeing each other at our best, and when we are speaking about ascent, I also need the mind to go down: "Each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves", Phil 2: 3. That is how true oneness is brought about, seeing one another in the light of how God sees us, persons on whom sonship has been conferred, persons who are drawn into this atmosphere of oneness at the same standard as divine Persons. It is not a negotiated oneness, but oneness brought about in us by occupation with Christ.

GJH Would all these things free us in the service of God? We are together for His Name, to remember Him and honour His Name. We often think of the subject path of the Lord. His Name was not honoured. But here is a room full of persons that seek to honour the Lord. It is quite a privilege.

PAG What happens in the line of ascending is that all that might encumber us is set aside. We are asked to set ourselves right before we come up to remember the Lord, and that is the right and necessary thing to do. But I would say this, I have known what it is to be adjusted even as the saints assemble. When you see the brethren and you see the loaf and the cup, maybe something comes to mind where I need adjustment. The Lord is gracious. We would always want to be right in order to be available to Him, and He would graciously help us to adjust ourselves so that there may be that oneness.

NJH The Lord Himself takes us up.

PAG That would relate, would you say, to His place as Head? Thus we are drawing directly from Him, but we would not do it apart from the Spirit. We would recognise that the Lord is the Prince of the princes of the Levites. He is the Minister of the holy places. He is the One, as it were, who is directing the matter.

NJH While He is divine, He is a Man. He is on our side.

PAG He is. What I would say for the sake of completeness is that Christ's power as Head is known, but the power of the Holy Spirit is also known. They work together. It is through Christ and by one Spirit (Eph 2: 18), and we are “strengthened with power by his [the Father's] Spirit in the inner man”, Eph 3: 16. So in that sense, would you say there is a convergence of divine power in order that the heart of God might be satisfied?

NJH They do not act as independent of each other. It is one will, and one power. It is a delightful thought that it is a Man that is ascending as we have here.

PAG Yes. We referred to Solomon's ascent. It was *his* ascent.

CJMcK Is ascension more to a Person than to a place? I was thinking that He says, “to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God”.

PAG Yes. I think in this setting that is very much so. We do come to

the point we refer to in the psalm -

This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it Ps 132: 14.

God brings us into the place of His rest. But it is only His rest because Christ is there. It is not His rest abstractly; it is His rest because Christ is there. If you go to a great palace, if the monarch is there at all, you might get two minutes to speak to the monarch, and the rest of the time you are occupied with the glory and grandeur of the place. That is not heaven. Heaven is characterised by the Person. The glory will be seen in the persons who are there and they will be like Christ, and they will have one Person in their view.

CJMcK In John 17: 24 the Lord prays, “I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory”. Is that the glory of the Person?

PAG Absolutely, and what a range of glories that would encompass. We have been taught that the glory of sonship is a glory that can be shared, but the glory of the Mediator is His. The glory of the Saviour, the glory of the Head, the glory of the Minister of the holy places, these are His. We can behold such glory; it is not beyond us. There is the glory He had with the Father along with the Father before the foundation of the world; that relates to His place in Godhead. We are not said to behold that. We can worship in the presence of it, but we can behold many glories that He has that make Him distinctive.

TRC In that regard, in John 14, the Lord says, “I go to prepare you a place”, but then He adds, “I am coming again and shall receive you to myself”, v 2, 3. So the place is there. We are received to Himself; that “where I am ye also may be”. We often speak of our enjoyment of that in a coming day when the Lord comes. Would it have a bearing on your exercise, that that place is prepared, but the Lord's desire is that, as He comes, that we ascend to that place where He is?

PAG Very much so. “I am coming to you” in John 14: 18 I would understand to be His characteristic disposition towards us. There is a time when He will come for us in actuality, and thereafter will be His appearing. In John 17 the Lord says, “this is the eternal life, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent”, v 3. It does not say, 'This *will be* the eternal life'; it *is* the eternal life. This would accord with what you are saying, that we can touch that

place of dwelling now. And the Spirit is spoken of as “the earnest of our inheritance”, Eph 1: 14. So the Spirit is the foretaste of all these things. That is what really pleases God, that what He has set on is being enjoyed by His saints now.

PJM **“**I ascend” is in the present tense. There was nothing to hinder this being accomplished. He had not yet ascended to His Father, but the word for the disciples is, “I ascend to my Father”. In other words, 'Come into this enjoyment now'.

PAG It helps us to understand what He means in John 4, that “the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth … God is a spirit; and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth”, v 23, 24. We are getting an insight into that here. “I ascend” is an ascension into a spiritual sphere. And God is a spirit. They who worship must worship in spirit. So that is in suitability to the place, but also in truth. Truth would involve the knowledge of God. The Lord says this is “my God and your God”. This is “my Father and your Father”. He is saying, 'I am able to show you who God is, so that you may worship in spirit and in truth'.

PJM So this is a subjective answer to what is in John 4?

PAG Yes. There was a mountain in John 4; there was a certain elevation. The woman said that the fathers of Samaria worshipped in this mountain (v 20), but the Lord has something far greater in mind. It is not a mountain on earth, but it is ascension into heaven.

LAH I want to ask as to the adjustment that Mary received in John 20. She really needed to know the Lord Jesus in a new condition, did she not? The Lord just speaks her name and she gets adjustment. Is it personal?

PAG The assembly never comes into John's gospel formally. But I think this word, “Mary”, addressed directly to this woman, shows that the assembly is in view. We know that the assembly is always in view. It says of the Lord that He “nourishes and cherishes it”, Eph 5: 29. And it speaks about “the washing of water by the word” (v 26), that there may be “no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things”, v 27. He is showing here in His approach to Mary, how He would take away all the things that might hinder and just leave it so that you are occupied with Him personally. She says to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni”. She immediately responds.

Even if we do require adjustment, one thing about the saints of the assembly is that they are in true relations with Christ. They are very quickly adjusted. She does not debate the matter. She accepts immediately what He is saying. This is in view of what we have been speaking of, worshipping in spirit and in truth. As you rightly said, she could not know Him in the condition that He was in before, but as adjusted she was being set forward towards worshipping in spirit and in truth. Would that be right?

LAH Yes, every barrier had been set aside, and she is really occupied with the Person.

PAG Her love was very great. She was offering to do the impossible. But the Lord was saying, 'The things that would be impossible for man have all been done; you just need now to be where I am', and that is a wonderful thing.

CAS You have been speaking about being occupied with a Person. She receives the most wonderful message, but the first thing she says to them is that she has seen the Lord. That is the key to it, is it not, to see the Person first?

PAG That is good. What she did was acknowledge His authority. “She had seen the Lord”, v 18. This word, “I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God”, is an authoritative word; she had the right to say it. And similarly, Paul says, as to the breaking of bread, “*I* received from the Lord, that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which he was delivered up, took bread”, 1 Cor 11: 23. The Lord's authority enters into our assembling to break bread, but I believe the recognition of His authority is essential for entering into the service of praise.

CAS Even when she did not have Him, she was still thinking of Him as Lord: “they have taken away my Lord”, v 13.

PAG Where was her compass, her sense of direction? As far as she was concerned they had gone if the Lord was not there. But “my Lord”, there He was. She had seen the Lord, and He had said these things to her, and no doubt she reported them faithfully.

JN So that the fruit is Godward rather than manward?

PAG Godward rather than manward, definitely. That is important, because our responsibilities manward will finish. We will come, if the

Lord will, to the gospel. That is manward, but it has God in view, no doubt. But that responsibility will finish; our responsibility to respond to God will never end. It will not feel like a responsibility, exactly. It will be something we delight to do, but nevertheless it will continue forever.

WMP You have spoken about being responsive to God and worship. You have mentioned that, and also praise. So is that really the prime thought in ascension? It is not exactly that we have a more privileged or blessed portion. It is really the outflow of that, as has been remarked. Is that what is in your mind?

PAG Yes, very much. We have spoken of sonship. Sonship is for God. It is a privilege conferred upon us, but it is for God's satisfaction, and that was what was in my mind, in referring to the burnt-offering; it was for God. The primary thought is that it was for God, and the offerer laid his hand on the head of the burnt-offering. There was the matter of atonement, so that righteousness was met, but really he identified himself, not with his sins or his past, but with what was for God. A local brother used to remind us often, about the importance of being occupied with what was for God. We can be very occupied - and not in any way unprofitably - with what is for us, what our blessings are. But what are our blessings for? They are for God. David said, “for all is of thee, and of that which is from thy hand have we given thee”, 1 Chron 29: 14. Why has God blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ? It is so that we can be responsive to Him. Why has He raised us up together and set us down together? It is so that we can be responsive to Him. To put it as simply as this, what is the point of a blessing? If it does not result in thanks to God, then it just becomes something that I have. It is a fine thing to have a spiritual blessing, but it is a finer thing for it to work out in response toward God.

Mr Darby comments that the end of Psalm 16 says, “thy countenance is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore”, v 11, Collected Writings vol 10: p338. That is taking account of the blessings that are in Christ. We see them objectively. But he also comments that Psalm 17 ends with, “I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness”, v 15. That is when we are formed by them. So in John's gospel we see what is in Christ, and in John's epistles we are formed by what we see. But what is the result to be? Well, likeness to Christ is surely for God's pleasure. God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” Gen 1: 26. What was that for? It was for His delight and pleasure. God's delight and pleasure is

that eternally He will have persons in His presence who are like Christ.

GJH What is a response Godward? How would we express that actively? I know we have about what it means to God, but what does praise Godward mean?

PAG In its simplest sense it means that we understand that He loves us and that we want to answer to that. It is simply that God is love, and therefore He is looking for an answer in love. Response to God would include the recognition of His revelation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It would involve that we recognise there is a vessel of praise, that is, the assembly. There is glory to God "in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages", Eph 3: 21. But the root of it all is love. Sometimes a brother might feel hindered. At the culmination of the service of praise, the saints of the assembly respond to God. A brother might question whether he is able for it. I never could be able on my own, but we are strengthened in the inner man by the Father's Spirit. And if what we have in mind is simply the expression of collective affection Godward, that in itself is a very great matter. We want to be intelligent, of course, but we should guard against thinking that this is too advanced for us. The Lord Jesus says, "my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God". And as has been remarked, He is the power for that. So do I have the power by myself? I do not need to. The power is in Christ, and it is by one Spirit. Does that help?

GJH We may be occupied with things that we have been saved from. But then there is adjustment and that helps us in responding to Christ, a living Man, and you focus on Him. I see that the crux of it is intelligent worship to God.

PAG Worship Godward means that we are thinking about what He appreciates, not what I appreciate, and He appreciates Christ above all else.

Glasgow

11th January 2026

List of initials (all local except where indicated):-
T R Campbell; P A Gray, Linlithgow; A J Henry; G J Henry; L A Henry; N J Henry; C J McKay; P J Metcalfe; J Newberry; W M Patterson; C A Seeley

A LIVING SACRIFICE

Scotie W Selman

Romans 12: 1-8

Dearly beloved, it is not my intent to go through all of these verses in detail. I read the whole portion to get the context. We have been helped during our time together as to the subject of faithfulness, and how precious it is to be reminded of, and begin with, the wonderful thought of God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness is something that we can rely upon. There is no failure with God, and there is no lack with God. We can be encouraged together, and I would desire for each one here to have a fresh sense of God's desire, and His love and His interest in you. Romans is very individual in character, and so much of what I desire to share with the brethren is of an individual character; it is God's desire that He would touch your heart afresh, that there would be something developed within you that might result in your blessing and your enjoyment of divine things, and ultimately that there might be an increase for His heart. There is no greater privilege, and there is nothing more precious than to be in the conscious reality of the knowledge that God is pleased and that His heart has been satisfied. There is no greater occupation than to be found in the gain and the good of such a wonderful opportunity, such a wonderful privilege.

I have been thinking about what we have had before us as to God's faithfulness, the faithfulness of Christ, and the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit; and in the last reading especially, the way in which there is to be seen in the saints the faithfulness that corresponds with divine faithfulness. It is to be of the same character; the faithfulness of God and of Christ and the Holy Spirit is to be seen in the saints, and it is to come out in the saints. It is to be witnessed; there is to be a testimony to God's faithfulness in the saints, and we can be encouraged in this journey as to that kind of faithfulness and the reality of it.

I was affected by this particular portion a while back in a way that I never had been before. I know it is a well-known verse and is often quoted, but it touched my heart in a way that it never has before. Paul says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice”. One of the things that touched my heart is the way that the feelings of the apostle Paul come out in his appeal. He says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren”. It is not merely that he was requesting or making known what they should do. His

feelings for the saints came out in the way that he appealed to them to present their bodies a living sacrifice. You can see that there was a sense of urgency and fervency in the way that he appealed to them. You can see his love for the saints coming out. This was not something that he was presenting in a legal sort of way, or as a rule that was to be followed. He had in his mind and heart the good of the saints; he knew that if they presented themselves, committed themselves in this way, there would be great gain and blessing for them, and there would be gain and blessing for God. How wonderful therefore it is to see his feelings coming out. This kind of feeling, concern, interest, and yearning should be amongst us, so that anything that we do and anything that we take up in relation to one another should be characterised by this kind of sincere love and desire as was seen in Paul. What was it that caused this sort of feeling in Paul's heart? It was his love for the saints in Rome. He did not, as far as I know, know the saints there. There were a few that he knew of, he had heard of them, but yet he still loved them, and his desire was for them that they would be established in the glad tidings.

Paul is writing to believers, and his desire is that they would be established in the glad tidings concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, chap 1: 1-4. His desire was that they would come to the gain of that simple introduction, that they might know Jesus Christ, God's Son, and that they might know him as Lord. They would own His authority, and would gain the benefit of being found in subjection and dependence. He goes through Romans, and he takes nothing for granted. He makes no assumptions because of his love for them, and his desire that they would be established. He says in chapter 15, that they might have “all joy and peace in believing, so that ye should abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”, v 13. That was ultimately his desire, his purpose in writing to them. It is a wonderful thing that he expresses. And so he goes through Romans very carefully and methodically. He makes no assumptions; he leaves no stone unturned; step by step, he walks them through the glad tidings, because he wants them truly to be in the gain of them.

Are you in the gain of the glad tidings? As a believer, are you in the gain of the glad tidings? That is what God intends. God's desire for you is not only that you would come into the gain of what you have been saved from, but what you have been saved for. That is where the fulness of blessing is always to be experienced. Often we are satisfied

with the knowledge of what we have been saved from, which is a blessing, and it is wonderful; it is precious. But how much more precious, and how much more blessing there is to be experienced, if we get over to God's side, because that is really what it is. This is God's side of the gospel. This is what God desires for Himself, what you have been saved for; and that is what Paul desired for them. So he walks them through that. He takes up the wonderful truth that they have been justified and saved in Christ, by His death and resurrection, and by faith in Him. He covers all of these wonderful subjects in Romans. But it is not merely taking them up in view of salvation from, but what they have been saved to. We need to be firmly established in these wonderful, essential truths that are presented in Romans, and to look at them from God's perspective, what God has in mind for us to enter into. I think that we get help when we do that. We often say, of course, that we speak to the young persons, but this is for us all, young and old. I will be very transparent to the young persons here: this verse has laid on to me at my age in a way that it never has before, and it has been very exercising to me. I desire to share that and trust that others might get a benefit of that, that your heart might be touched as much.

One of the things that I would truly desire for us each one is that when we leave this time together, as a result of what our brother has brought before us as to the faithfulness of God and the faithfulness of Christ and the Spirit, and all that has come in, and all that we have shared, there would be a deepening exercise in desire to commit oneself to the things of God and what is for Christ. And also that there would be a deepening, commitment, and devotion to one another, to God's people, those who are so precious to Christ.

So Paul comes to chapter 11 and he speaks about mercy. He says, “For as indeed *ye* also once have not believed in God, but now have been objects of mercy through the unbelief of *these*; so these also have now not believed in your mercy, in order that *they* also may be objects of mercy. For God hath shut up together all in unbelief, in order that he might shew mercy to all. O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable his judgments, and untraceable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor? or who has first given to him, and it shall be rendered to him? For of him, and through him, and for him are all things: to him be glory for ever. Amen”, v 30-36. It is interesting to me that when the apostle Paul, in writing this epistle, and covering a vast array of essential truths, comes to this wonderful subject of mercy, he gives the

sense that this affects his heart so deeply, he has such an appreciation of the mercy of God that has been shown, that is available, that his heart wells forth unrestrainedly in praise and worship and adoration to the very One who has made that mercy possible. Now, that is the basis on which he appeals to those in Rome. And it is the basis that God would appeal to you, His compassion, His mercy, His longing. “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God”, and we have the thought of mercy in this. There is also the thought of longing, the longing of God's heart. And so that is the basis on which he appeals to them, his heart having been so deeply affected, and touched in a very real way inwardly, it causes him to break out and praise and worship.

When you think of the mercy of God, and the mercy that has been shown to you, does it affect your heart in this way? Does it cause you to break out in responsive praise and worship and thankfulness and adoration? It should. I cannot answer that question for you but I think that it is of the utmost importance that you ask yourself, what effect does this have? What effect does this have on my heart? You see the effect that it had on Paul's heart, and I believe that it had such a deep effect upon him that this is what led him to make this appeal to the dear saints of God: “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice”.

So what is meant by that, “a living sacrifice”? Well, firstly it is living; it is a continuous, ongoing thing. It really is our manner of living; it is our way of life. It shows that I am governed by the love and grace and mercy of God in the way that I live, in the way that I carry myself. It is what I occupy my mind with, what I pursue; my heart's pursuits, my longings; all are characterised and governed by all these wonderful things. Everything starts with the mercy of God, and I appreciate the mercy God has shown to me; that appreciation has developed over time. And then there becomes an exercise in one's heart to present oneself as a living sacrifice to God. It is a continuous, ongoing matter, and so I would ask the question, do you have the desire in the heart to hold yourself in this way? It is a privilege; it is an honour. And you have the opportunity now to do so. But that opportunity will come to a close: now is the time to commit yourself in these ways. I can assure you, there is not one older brother or sister here that would tell you to put it off; I am sure that every older brother and sister here would tell you that they wish they had committed themselves early in their lives; I know that I can tell you that. And so that opportunity is here for you today, to

commit yourself in that way, a living sacrifice, as a practical demonstration of the love and goodness of God, what He has worked in you, His work in you, coming out in a very real and genuine way that can be witnessed and demonstrated. Well, how wonderful that is.

It involves sacrifice. I feel compelled to emphasise that, because we live in a day that is influenced and characterised and driven by convenience and comfort. And the result is that we shun anything that requires any sort of effort or disruption in our lives, or sacrifice. May we not miss out on the privilege and opportunity of presenting our bodies, our lives, as a living sacrifice to God and to His people because of convenience and comfort. I know that if we take things up on the basis of convenience, first of all, we are going to miss out on true blessing. I also know that taking things up on the basis of convenience and comfort will always result in compromise. May we be preserved from it and may we be encouraged to see this as being a privilege and an honour, to commit ourselves as a living sacrifice.

Now, we get help as we go through this particular portion where Paul says that the sacrifice is holy, it is acceptable to God, and it is your intelligent service. And that helps us as to what characterises the service; it is holy; it is pure. So we would think about our motives - not to get over occupied with motives, but I do think that motive is a good indicator as to the reality of God's work in persons. We can use them to gauge where we are, the Spirit of God can do that. I would encourage a person taking up service to be really before the Lord in that way. What is my motive? It is what I am taking up, how I am taking up, and why. What is the motive? Mr Paul Johnson always used to refer to taking soundings. It is good to take soundings, to be transparent. It is good to be honest with yourself, and the Spirit of God will help you.

We are not to be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of the mind. That is another very helpful point in this appeal because we are not to be conformed to this world. We are not to think about service, or take up this living sacrifice, in the way that the world takes things up. We are not to be conformed to the world. You may be outwardly separate from the world and still conformed to the world. You may outwardly be separate, but you may still think the way the world thinks; you may still be motivated by what motivates the world. These are good questions to ask yourself. Am I motivated by what motivates the world? Am I driven by what drives the world? Am I conformed to the world? Or have I been transformed by the renewing of the mind? Paul

speaks in Romans 7 about serving “in newness of spirit”, v 6. I think the two go together. It is a new way of thinking, and that new way of thinking is on the basis of self-denial, setting aside of my will, and considering for the will of the Lord. A young brother recently in the preaching spoke of taking up your cross. It is the principle of self-denial, taking up your cross. Now that is a conscious effort and exercise; it is a conscious decision to take up one's cross, to deny oneself, to occupy oneself, mind, and heart with what is for God. Paul says it is that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

I will just briefly refer to a few things. One thing that is interesting is the emphasis on the members of the body: presenting one's body a living sacrifice is practically worked out in the body. And so that is one of the exercises that I think is so important for us, each one, to have an understanding of the body. Paul talks about how God has dealt to each a measure of faith. He goes on to talk about different gifts, about how we are many members, but not all members have the same office. “Thus we, being many, are one body in Christ”. How wonderful it is to be members of this, and all members one of one another. And so these members are supporting one another, helping one another. Is that something that is on your heart daily when you consider your brother or sister, that you are considering for them, that you pray for them, your heart longs for the best for them? That is being members of one another. These members of the body support one another; they help one another. And so we are going to encourage one another in that way. Paul says that something is dealt to everyone that is among you. He says one is “not to have high thoughts above what he should think; but to think so as to be wise, as God has dealt to each a measure of faith”. The question was asked in the reading whether faith can be measured. Well, here you have in this scripture that to each has been given a measure of faith. How wonderful that is, that each has this measure of faith. The point is not how much I have, or how much you have; the fact is that we have been given a measure of faith.

We have considered Matthew 25, where we had a man going out of the country, and he called his men together, and delivered them talents. He gave one five, and he gave one two, and he gave one just one, v 15. In another parable, they were all given the same but here it is different. That links on with the measure of faith, because it says that he divided to each according to his particular ability; that is the sovereignty

of God, the way that He distributes these talents. And so each has been given a measure of faith. It is not how much I have been given, and how much you have been given, or whether or not I have been given more than you, or you have been given more than me. It is the fact that we have been given a measure of faith, and we have a responsibility to fill that out. What is interesting is that, for each one who filled that out, the gain was equal to what they were given. That leads to the verse about not having high thoughts beyond what you should: you fill out what you have been given. You do not try to go beyond what you have been given; that is not the point. The point is that you fill out what you have been given, that you walk in the light that you have, you move in the appreciation that God has given to you in His grace, and you fill that out. Now that is so very encouraging. I think young persons should find it so helpful to consider that you have been given a measure of faith. This is not a special class of persons; this is each one: each one has been given a measure of faith. The question is, are you filling that out? Now here is what is wonderful about the one who filled out his five talents: the Lord says, "Well, good and faithful bondman, thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter into the joy of thy lord", Matt 25: 21. He says the same thing to the one who filled out two. So again, it is not how much you have been given or how much I have been given: it is whether or not I am filling out what I have been given, whether or not I am using to its fullest extent what has been given to me.

Think of what that means to the heart of Christ. You see that here: in His glory He says, "enter into the joy of thy lord". It is His joy in seeing persons fill out what He has provided, what He has given. It is what was given to them. What a healthy way to view this faith that has been given, this measure of faith. Just realise that it has been given to you, that it is not what you produced. It is not what you come up with; it is not according to your natural abilities. It is what has been provided to you.

Well, how can we question it? If it has been given to us of God, how can we question the use of it, and what it will produce? We can have confidence that it will produce what is according to His own mind and heart, and that there will be results. That is a precious thing to consider. We talk about these different gifts and how each one of us has been given something. I will ask it again: are you using what you have been given? That is for me as well, that is for each one of us, to truly have that honest assessment and to be before the Lord about it, to be encouraged and exercised to fill out what we have been given. It is

linked with this thought of presenting your body “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God”.

I have talked about why we should be encouraged to take on this exercise. We have been impressed as to what touched Paul's heart, as to the mercy of God that was shown to him. I trust your heart has been affected by the mercy of God that has been shown to you in that wonderful sacrifice that was seen in Christ, and the way that He went that suffering way; His commitment and His devotion and where it led Him; to think of how Christ went that way for you: how He went to the cross. He laid down His life: that was for you; that is the supreme sacrifice. Think of the sacrifice from God's perspective. It says, God “has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all”, Rom 8: 32. God sacrificed; He delivered up what was so infinitely precious to Him. God Himself willingly delivered Him up. And that was for you. I trust that we would be encouraged to take on this commitment, to present our bodies a living sacrifice in response to that, knowing that God's love and grace and mercy has been shown to me. It has been shown to you.

But persons might ask, well, how? How do I go about doing this? It may be young persons, perhaps through the lack of experience are not sure how. Maybe you really do not know how to start. It may be in your heart, and I trust that is true. I trust it has been something that has been weighing on you for some time, something you have been thinking about, that you have been in prayer about it, that you want to commit yourself, to devote yourself to the things of God and to God's people, but you are just not sure how. One of the first things that I would say to you is that, and it is a very simple thought, you simply make yourself available. In Isaiah 6, you have a prophet. He says, “Here am I; send me”, 8. And the Lord says, “Go”. That is an important point, that you move under His leadership, His direction. But it begins with a willingness on your side. Is there that willingness in your heart, to say, 'Here am I; use me'? It is not to dictate the terms of your use - I want to do this, or I want to serve in this way. No, I am just available. I am here to be used in some way. I think it is so important that your availability is often determined by your occupation. That was something that came to me as I was thinking about this, and reflected even on my own life and my own experience. When I say occupation, I do not mean your work or your employment, although that could have some bearing on this. What I mean by occupation is what it is that you occupy your mind and your heart with. That will determine your availability. I can think even in

my own history, the things I have occupied my mind and my heart with that have eaten up my time, and taken away from the opportunities, limited the opportunities to present oneself a living sacrifice, to be of some use in whatever way that God sees fit. One thing that I would really encourage you to think about is, what is my occupation? What is it that I occupy my mind and my time with?

I could not help but think about Mark. We often speak of Mark in the Acts. An issue arose because Paul was concerned as to Mark. He did not feel it was wise to bring along Mark at that time because he had abandoned him, chap 15: 37-39. So I use Mark as one who started out committed and was used. But then something came in - we do not know what it was. And there may be something that has come into your life that has hindered you. I do not know what that might be, just like it does not really tell us as to what the issue was with Mark. But the fact is he was not available; he abandoned Paul in the service. I think it is interesting that the word is “abandoned”. It is not that he just went away; he abandoned them. It emphasises the fact that there was real need there, that Mark was needed, and he abandoned them. That makes it a very serious matter. It is not that he just decided that he was going to fall away, or not pursue; he abandoned them. Scripture uses that word because Paul felt it deeply, that this brother was needed and he abandoned them. You are needed, brothers, sisters, young and old. There is not one person sitting in this room who is not needed. I trust that you would be encouraged to take things up along those lines, to come to that realisation in your own soul as to how much you are needed. Mark was needed, Paul felt.

I do not want to end on that, to leave Mark with negative thoughts, because we can rejoice that he was recovered. Paul specifically says, “Bring Mark” (2 Tim 4: 11); he is still needed, but now he is available; he is serviceable. Would you desire to be serviceable to the saints? It is ultimately for God; it is for Christ. But the best way that we can serve God and serve the Lord is by serving one another, caring for and serving the saints. And so Paul rejoiced in his heart when he wrote that, “Bring Mark”; 'I need him: he is serviceable again.' Would you desire to be serviceable? When you are it brings joy to the heart of the saints and it brings joy to the Lord. It does not say what Mark was going to do, how he was going to be used. That is not the point. It is just that he was available and serviceable. How we can rejoice in the recovery of Mark. It may be that you have been thinking about it, and praying about it, just

learning about it but not sure how to commit yourself, but do not over-complicate it: make yourself available. I know this, having been young once: often we hesitate because we do not really know, we do not really know our place, do not really know what our gift is; we do not really know our part. We do not really know how we are to be used. And so we say, 'As soon as I figure that out, I will commit myself'. That is not how this works; that is backwards, but the natural mind thinks that way. You commit yourself first. I really enjoyed a comment by Mr Stoney: he says you present yourself a living sacrifice and your gift will come, vol 1 p313. Now hopefully that encourages you to commit yourself. You want to know how to identify your gift, and what part and place you have: present your body a living sacrifice, and that will come in time. We can be encouraged in that.

Presenting our body as a living sacrifice is what is to characterise and encourage us in that service. And one of the things that is so important is affection for Christ. We talk about motive: that is to be our motive, our affection for Him. It begins with His love, His work, His goodness. I was thinking about the mighty men in 2 Samuel 23: 15-17; it lists all the men, but it does not list Joab. Joab performed mighty deeds and mighty acts, and great feats. Go through 2 Samuel and see what he accomplished. That is not the point here. The point with the mighty men was their energy of faith, and what moved them. They are referred to as the mighty men of David. I think that links on with what we have had today as to faithfulness, the energy of faith. It was the way in which they moved, the way in which they carried themselves. It was what they occupied their minds with, and what was important and precious to them. I love the example of the three that broke through the camp of the Philistines: “And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is in the gate! And the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, which is in the gate, and took it, and brought it to David; however he would not drink of it, but poured it out to Jehovah. And he said, Be it far from me, Jehovah, that I should do this thing! is it not the blood of the men that went at the risk of their lives? Therefore he would not drink it. These things did the three mighty men”.

Think firstly about what this meant to David. Think about what such things mean to the heart of Christ. Think of the nearness of these men who overheard David express the longing of his heart. They were

not commanded to do this; they were not instructed or directed. No; it was the feelings of David that they knew about. Naturally speaking, persons looking for this would say this was foolish, three men breaking through the camp of the Philistines; there is too much risk involved; this is too dangerous. But that is not what is to motivate us; it is the heart of Christ. It is His affection, His love, His longing. It is the feelings of Christ that is to move us. Great things can be accomplished if we move on the basis of love for Christ and what is for his heart. And so there are things that naturally seem a bit risky, a bit dangerous. We can apply this in our practical lives, the decisions that we are faced with, the tests and trials. You might know in your heart, deep down inside, that this is God's will; you might know that this is for the heart of Christ, this is what will bring His heart satisfaction and joy. Naturally speaking we might say it costs too much. May we be helped to preserve the value of love; may we truly fill our hearts with affection for Christ, and act on the basis of what is for His heart. That would help us to overcome the so-called risks and dangers, and would move us like these three men who broke through. They brought back what was for the heart of David, and you see how precious it was to him. He poured it out; it became an offering to Jehovah. How wonderful the increase is.

I want to mention affection for the saints. That is to characterise our service; it is to move our hearts in relation to what we take on as a living sacrifice. In Romans 16, it is always so affecting to consider Phœbe and the affection and consideration that she had for the saints. That is what motivated her, and that is what characterised her service. And how precious it is to look at the way Paul brings her before us: she was “a helper”. I have always been encouraged with this because, as we have already had before us, it is not just what you do, it is filling out your measure of faith with what God has given to you for whatever the time, whatever the need. She was “a helper of many”, v 2. It does not speak about any specifics as to what she exactly did, but that is one thing that is to characterise all service, to be a helper. That attitude would help us, if we simply looked at service in that way, that I am going to make myself available, I am going to move on the basis of affection for Christ. What can be a help, an encouragement to the saints? She was “a helper of many”. And Paul mentions Priscilla and Aquila as well. I think the way that Paul says that they for his life “staked their own neck; to whom not *I* only am thankful, but also all the assemblies”, is so encouraging, v 4. Think of the effect that they had, not only in their locality but outside their locality as well. There was something seen. It

was very public; it was precious.

Now presenting oneself a living sacrifice is an individual thing. And yet you see here what I believe to be an example of the power behind a marriage in the Lord. You have two persons who have committed themselves as living sacrifices. They had shared a common bond; they shared a common exercise. And they shared a love for the Lord. And so you see this is a marriage in the Lord with common interests, common desires, and a shared exercise; you can see the effect that they had. How wonderful marriage in the Lord is. And I encourage all, especially young persons contemplating marriage, to realise the value of a marriage in the Lord, and the greatness of what a couple can affect in their own locality. I do believe our primary responsibility is in our locality. So this marriage in the Lord resulted in great things for the saints. And they were a great help; they were a great encouragement.

I will mention one other thing as to the thought of the affection that we are to have for the saints, and how this is to characterise this living sacrifice. In 1 Corinthians 16, it refers to "the house of Stephanas … and they have devoted themselves to the saints for service", v 15. So we have the individual side of things with Phœbe; we have a marriage in the Lord, a married couple: now we have a household. I want to encourage persons to understand the advantages that a baptised household can afford, to provide to the locality in the way of supporting all of Israel. Mr Paul Johnson used to talk about taking up your baptism. You have been baptised but have you taken it up? Baptism brings before us how through His death we have been disassociated from this world, and we have been brought into association with Him. We have been placed in Christian ground; we are now found in association with Him. Have you taken that up - disassociated yourself from the world and associated yourself with Christ; and moving on the wonder and greatness of that ground of resurrection, Christian ground? How wonderful it is. You see this with the household. I believe what you have represented here was those members of that house taking up their baptism together, and the unity of the house. And there is nothing more powerful, if I can put it that way, as far as what provides encouragement and edification and service locally, than a unified household, a baptised household.

And so I would just leave that with the saints for our encouragement. I trust that we would be encouraged to present our

bodies a living sacrifice. That that would be something that we would take on, young and old, that you would be encouraged to make yourself available to move on the basis of affection for Christ. And then ultimately, that that would be seen practically demonstrated in the affection that you have for the saints, and in your service, especially locally, whether it is an individual, as a married couple, or as a baptised household.

May we be encouraged for His Name's sake.

Indianapolis

29th November 2025

THE PLACE OF A SKULL

Trevor R Campbell

Matthew 27:32-36
Mark 15:21-23
Luke 23:32, 33
John 19:17, 18, 25

We began Lord's day with Hymn 28 -

Hail! Thou once despised Jesus.

“He is despised and left alone of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their faces;- despised, and we esteemed him not”, Isa 53: 3. In considering this I have been drawn to the fact that the four gospel writers draw attention to the place where the Lord Jesus was crucified. I am affected by even reading it, beloved brethren: the Place of a skull.

I suppose there has never been a time when the wisdom, the intellect, the intelligence of man is thrust so forcibly upon us. We see it in man's inventions and the technology of the world. So-called artificial Intelligence and the like are quickly gathering pace in this world. The Place of a skull: I suppose there is no greater place to learn things than by standing by the cross. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - no doubt indited by the Spirit - draw attention to this fact that that was where the Lord Jesus was crucified. A skull: we have probably all seen one in a museum. There is just nothing there, is there? I suppose it is the flesh - I mean the outward skin and our features - that gives a person a certain appearance of attractiveness or respectability. At the cross, Jesus was crucified at the Place of a skull, where everything that man is was laid bare. Everything that I am is laid bare. It is something to come to that, beloved brethren.

We have just had a word about what the Lord has secured on the other side of death, another order of man. It is a wonderful fact that these four gospel writers draw our attention to this: “And having come to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a skull”. Those that crucified the Lord were not the ignorant of the world; they were not the poor, the uneducated or the unintelligent. They were the best that man could offer, the princes, the nobles; the scribes, the Pharisees, all those that knew the law, but at the cross it was all laid bare. What a matter, beloved, just to take account of that.

The Lord would bring us to certain places to teach us, to teach us about the heart of man and ourselves, but too at the cross we learn the heart of God. It is a blessed matter that while man was completely exposed, the love of God was shown and could be shown in the greatest way possible. It says of "the princes of this age" "had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory", 1 Cor 2: 8. You might say they were the best of the world, yet they cast Him out. He was "cast away indeed as worthless by men, but with God chosen, precious", but the intelligentsia of the world, they rejected Him: despised Him, cast Him out, rejected Him, and had no place for Him. What was the price? Thirty pieces of silver. "They appointed to him thirty pieces of sliver", Matt 26: 15. What a matter, the world's valuation of Jesus.

The prophet Zechariah speaks of these pieces of silver. You do not often get sarcasm in the Bible, but the prophet says, "a goodly price": "a goodly price that I was prized at by them", chap 11: 13. That is my Saviour, beloved; that is the One that was cast out as worthless. No price could properly be put on Jesus, but at the cross the heart of man, the mind of man, was all laid bare, and that was their valuation. May it affect our hearts.

I love to consider the way that John writes: while he speaks of the place, he says that there was with Him "two others, one on this side, and one on that, and Jesus in the middle" (chap 19: 18): "in the middle". John does not even tell us what these men were or what they had done, just "two others, one on this side, and one on that". Even in such a scene, even on the cross, the Place of a skull, God saw to it that that precious blessed Man was distinct. He was there "in the middle", the blessed Saviour. Luke tells about the malefactor: what he was to the heart of Christ. It was the Place of a skull, and yet there was one there that could draw attention to His distinctiveness: "this man has done nothing amiss", Luke 23: 41. A shaft of light entered into that man's heart to recognise the value and the preciousness of the Man that was beside him. What contemplation for our souls.

And then John tells of these persons that were by the cross of Jesus; just a few, beloved brethren. We are in a day of small things. Even at the cross there were just a few. Let us be among the few that are prepared to stand by the cross of Christ, to own His value to us; the One that has secured everything for God, the One that has secured everything for us. We have been brought into wondrous light too, and

as our brother has read in John 20, what the Lord finds in a company was prepared to be faithful to Him, apart from the world.

I challenge my own heart. What does it really mean to me that the Lord Jesus has been rejected and cast out of this scene as worthless? Am I prepared to take my place beside the Lord? The world has cast Him out. The wisdom of the world had no place for Him. And that still is the case. We can see that by the wisdom of men passing laws that are completely contrary to the will of God, contrary to the truth as it has come down to us. That is the world that we live in; it is the Place of a skull. I challenge my heart: why would I have anything to do with it? We need to meet righteousness, but may we just have an impression that the world is the Place of a skull; there is no place for Jesus there. But there is a company that love Him and they are found in John 20, and the Lord comes in amongst them. He is the One that is ascending, and He breathes into them. And we have the Holy Spirit to preserve us and keep us. That is where we find wisdom; that is where we find light, through the power of the Holy Spirit and having our eyes on the Man that is above, the same Man that was here. The Place of a skull was where He was crucified by men, but now He is exalted in glory.

May it affect us. May we be drawn to Him in an increasing way, beloved brethren. And may we be encouraged by these thoughts. May the Lord bless the word.

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