THE WAITING TIME

AND

OTHER MINISTRY

BY

BERT TAYLOR

VOLUME 3

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FOREWORD

The main object of these five volumes is to collect the articles of ministry by our brother Bert Taylor that were first published in two magazines, *A Word in its Season* and *Notes of Ministry*. These have been supplemented from addresses published in several other books, and a few recordings of meetings that have not been published before. Our brother served in a number of special three-day meetings for which notes were published in books; these are not included in this collection. However, this volume does include the notes of meetings in New York which were only published in *A Word in its Season.* Ministry published in periodicals becomes less available than what is issued in books, and I want some of this wealth of material to be available to different generations, some of whom would not ever have had copies of the magazines, or known our brother when he was serving.

Robert Taylor was born to Andrew and Lily Taylor on 11 September 1925 and grew up in Markinch, Fife, where his family supported the local meeting. His father was a cobbler. He served a bakery apprenticeship in Dundee and spent his working life in the industry, including, after his marriage, a time in Northern Ireland; and some years with a chain of shops owned by his uncle. A need for employment brought him with his wife and daughter to live in Hendon for nearly twenty years up to 1993, before he eventually returned with his wife to Kirkcaldy for the remainder of his life. The Lord took our brother on 15 December 2024, at the age of 99.

The articles collected in these books show how widely and for how many years Bert Taylor served the Lord and His people in ministry. They span a period of over 40 years from 1974 to 2017. These were years of recovery for those with whom he had fellowship; ministry the Lord gave through many different men not only re-establishing what had been overshadowed and departed from, but pointing a way forward, and bearing on their present state and needs.

Many will remember appreciating our brother's part in this—as I did—a sense of urgency with which he exhorted the brethren to look beyond the limitations of our times and to seek out and stand in the good of the inheritance that God has set before us.

Previously published texts, which our brother will have reviewed, have not been materially altered; those appearing for the first time in these books have been lightly revised from transcripts.

I trust others who are now able to read this selection will profit from it for the glory of the Lord.

ANDREW BURR

2026

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GRACE—I

Titus 2: 11-14
John 1: 14-18
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RT I thought there might be profit in looking into the expression in Titus that the grace of God has appeared, and the effect that it has had. It is a great feature of the dispensation in which we are, the dispensation of grace. We will be helped to see later the result it is going to have. I am not thinking only of the way grace has met us as to our sins and our debts, but of the formative effect that grace should have on us. The passage goes on to say, "the grace of God which carries with it salvation … has appeared". I thought we might speak of that today—"has appeared". We may speak later of how grace teaches us, but we could speak now of how it has appeared and the effect that it has had as having appeared. The law came in on tables of stone, and there was a certain glory about it, but the incoming of grace required the Son, a divine Person, to bring it into expression, and the greatness of the One who has introduced it, you may say, ensures its continuance, as this passage suggests. The Scriptures we have read speak of grace having appeared, grace subsisting and grace reigning. It is the great power that is to dominate the dispensation. If our hearts were confirmed in it, what stability it would bring about, and a change of character in persons. The epistles emphasise repeatedly the danger of not being formed in grace. Paul says to the Corinthians that the grace of God may not be received in vain (2 Cor 6: 1); to the Galatians that they had fallen from grace (Gal 5: 4); to the Hebrews as to the danger of any one lacking the grace of God, Heb 12: 15. I refer to this only to show the dangers, and, on the other hand, the importance of allowing grace to have its perfect work in bringing about formatively a character in the saints that would mark them off as of this dispensation. The danger with us, and with the Galatians and the Corinthians, is to fall back on another principle. I thought that contemplating in John's gospel the One who has brought it in

might help us to be affected by the appearing of grace. John was affected by the glory of it—"a glory as of an only-begotten with a father, full of grace and truth". We might have read in Luke, which deals more with grace as meeting our needs. It is important that we realise that grace has met our liabilities and our needs, producing a thankful spirit in us. But I think John would bring out a more formative side, that we become like the One in whom grace has been expressed. As you follow through in John the persons who received it, you see its formative character: the woman in John 4 left her waterpot, she had another principle, another power of life in her; the man in John 9 and others in the gospel had come not only to appreciate grace but to appreciate the One in whom it is expressed. This may be a starting point for us to get some sense of the One in whom this grace has reached us and how it is continuing, as it says in Romans, it is reigning. There is a wonderful foundation in righteousness, alluding no doubt to the death of Christ, but the foundation is there, that grace may reign; never to leave the throne but dominates and is the great power and principle that is to flow into our hearts to mark us off as being of this dispensation. I trust the Spirit may help us to be strengthened and will open up something of the glory of what has come in, to draw our hearts into the wealth of what is available for us.

LMcF It carries with it salvation for all men. Do the thoughts of God have the whole creation in mind? The Lord Jesus came in as the Son of man to bring that grace into expression, do you think?

RT Yes, that is very beautiful. He came in in John's gospel as the Son of man who is in heaven. Thus He brought the wealth of heaven with Him, and, as you say, it carries with it salvation. What opposition He met at every turn, but the power of grace carries with it salvation. It clears liabilities under which man lay, but the end is that we may be formed in the character of this grace that is to fill our hearts. So in John it says, "the Word became flesh". What He brought into that condition, "the Word became flesh"! There is what is infinite about it; it is beyond what we can compass, but the grandeur

of it is to affect us. What grace in such a One—"the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth".

EFC It has been said that grace is the love of God away from home, having to be in difficult circumstances. The Lord Jesus came into that in manhood, did He not, into this world of sin and woe?

RT I think in John's gospel you can see where the home of grace was; it was in His links with the Father. He brought grace into those circumstances, as you said, away from home. John is full of that; the disciples went to their own homes but He had another home, with the Father and the Father's love, and John is impressed with that. So that grace is not something that comes from earth but it is from heaven; it has come from the glory, and it comes to us in our need; love adapting itself to the need that we may have power in this scene of death to reign and to reign in life.

PEM I recall you remarking that every one of Paul's epistles carries at the end a touch as to grace.

RT There is more than that; he begins them with grace and he ends them with grace: and he has the same touch of grace to Corinth as he has to Ephesus; grace does not make any distinction about our state because it has its resource in something else. So it would meet the state, whatever it is, be it Corinth or Ephesus. Whatever he has had to say to them in the epistle he closes that grace may be with them. In one of them he says, grace be with your spirit, Phil 4: 23.

HGH So it teaches us. That is your thought, is it not?

RT We will come to the teaching, perhaps, in another reading, but I thought we might get some sense of how it has appeared. As you suggest, the effect of it is that we may be formed by this great power that has appeared, that we do not go back to law or the flesh or such things, but are attracted into this flow of divine grace that is reigning and is continuing through the whole dispensation in spite of what has come into it.

JS In Luke 4 the Lord was very deliberate in taking up the book. He found the place and, having found it, He sat down.

Do you think He was establishing this great principle and never going to deviate from it, in view of a full result?

RT He says there, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears". It was there in all its fulness. The passage had often been read before no doubt, but never read in the way in which He read it. There is a beautiful touch in that passage too; it says, "he has anointed me". Think of the Spirit being in it too! What wealth has come in with the grace that has appeared; it was there that day to meet the needs and to draw people as delivered to come to be followers of the heavenly One.

JAP It is "the words of grace" in Luke 4 and He stopped at the passage about vengeance; He did not read that. What would you say?

RT It is because He was emphasising what was there "today". There will be another day for vengeance. But, as you say, He stopped at that word and said, Today this is fulfilled. It was there for them. He mourns about it later and says if they had known what was for their peace. They did not grasp it, but they wondered at the words of grace. He was opposed in that ministry but He just went through their midst: He did not bring in the day of vengeance. They would have taken Him to the brow of the hill but He just passed through them in His grace. It brings out the infinite character of grace that the very circumstance into which it came never set it aside, but it triumphed over them.

LDP Why are grace and peace so often linked together?

RT I think they go together: the more we are formed in the character of grace, there would be more peace, do you think?

LDP The Father also is mentioned—grace and peace from God our Father.

RT Yes; a number of things are put with grace in the Scriptures, and peace is one of them. It comes very much into Paul's greetings, grace and peace be with the brethren. I think these things go together. We may see later how the effect of being formed in grace promotes peace; it is opposite to contention. Grace would silence these features of the flesh

and make way for the enjoyment of peace. Do you think the glory of it is in the One who has introduced it? The law came in and there were angels there; it was written on tables of stone. It says, "the law was given by Moses", but here is a divine Person come into those conditions, "became flesh, and dwelt among us" and He brought something in which John finds hard to define, He brought in something that was wholly new but very attractive.

GDR As related to ourselves, would you say that it is supply? Long ago someone asked a question to define grace, and the reply was supply.

RT Yes, I think so. I think grace is a never ending supply. It says, Let us draw near to the throne that we may find grace for seasonable help, see Heb 4: 16. If we just got some impression of the fulness of it—"of his fulness we all have received"—it would connect with what you are saying; the supply is always there, more than the difficulties. We have in our time come against some very difficult circumstances, but whatever comes into the dispensation there is grace to meet it.

JS Would you say more about fulness as linked with grace.

RT It is "for of his fulness" and "full of grace and truth", very rich and full expressions. Would you say something about it?

JS The law perfected nothing, it exposed man's state, but does it lead us to the thought of all that was in this blessed Person? He is to become a new source of supply, is He not? John is speaking reflectively; everything is to come from this wonderful new source of supply.

RT Yes, the law perfected nothing. It was just and good but there is no fulness about it; it was all written down and that was it. The idea of fulness brings out that there is an inexhaustible supply in a Person who has come near to us. He became flesh, He has come near to us and brought that fulness within our reach. The fulness is available today, as it was at the beginning of the dispensation, because of the One in whom it is shining.

CFD So that the introduction of grace awaited the incoming of Christ.

RT I think so. Say some more.

CFD The law of Moses has been referred to and the necessity for law, but the Lord Jesus introduced an entirely new line, which awaited His ministry in manhood to come into expression. The early part of Luke has been referred to—the grace that was there became manifest in the words that proceeded from Christ and it brought in an entirely new line of things which really involves a divine attribute. Is that right?

RT Yes, indeed it is. The whole of heaven was moved as He came in. I think the reference in Titus to the grace of God having appeared is an allusion to the incarnation; there may be more in it, but there would be that in it. And you can see, as you said, in Luke how the whole heavenly host was moved that something new had come in; they said a Saviour is born who is Christ the Lord, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace", Luke 2: 14. Something had come in that had never been before; the answer to the fall, you may say, came in in the incarnation, and was available in the whole of His ministry. Amid all the opposition it carried with it salvation, it remained in all its fulness through every day.

DMW Are we helped then to see that His title, the Word, awaited this One coming in to express it? It would help us to see that this title "the Word" is connected with the roll of the book in what God would bring in according to His own mind, and thoughts, and purpose expressed in a Man here.

RT Yes, very good. So that it brings in substantiality in the Word, in One who came here in whom the will of God and all that God had ever required from man was perfectly expressed and made way for the outshining of this grace towards men in its fulness. Have you some more to say about the Word?

DMW I was thinking of our brother's thought that it awaited the incoming of this One before it could be expressed. "The Word" would indicate that to us, would it not, the expression of everything that was in God's heart and mind?

RT It was always there. Although there was a period of law, there was grace there; otherwise man would not have survived. Grace was there but for it to be expressed in its fulness it required a divine Person, the Word.

DMW So Moses could not take them into the land, could he?

RT Why?

DMW For our own education, that he was representative of the law. It waited on a divine Person fully to fill things out and to make known the mind of God for man.

RT It would help us to be committed to this formative line of grace, that we may come into eternal life, as Romans goes on to, and preserve us from falling back on these other principles, as the Galatians did. But the charm of "the Word became flesh", is to draw us to be kept under the influence and the power of what has come into expression in this glorious Person, is it not?

DMW Would you say that, as we ask ourselves the question, How do we learn grace? that it can be learned only through this blessed One?

RT Yes. John says here, "we have contemplated his glory". You get the impression reading this passage that John finds it difficult to frame it into words; he saw something that was entirely new he says, "as of an only-begotten". As has been referred to already, behind the fulness and expression of grace is the idea of relationship of the Son with the Father. The Son here in manhood but bringing the wealth of heaven and, you may say, the grace of the economy, as we may speak of it later, into expression, to have a formative effect upon the spirits of men.

JAP Perhaps this is a poor word, but the Lord really had to contend for grace in John's gospel. It says about the disciples that they wondered that He spoke with a woman (John 4: 27); and clearly in chapter 8 the same thing, and chapter 9, He went right forward almost without support in the disseminating of this great matter. Is that right?

RT Yes, the support was from the Father. No other power could support grace; it had to come from heaven. It is found on earth, but grace flows from above. It must have a great fountain-head and that is in the Father. No one in debt or in bondage can show grace; it is something that flows from royalty really, from the richness and the glory of what God is, to meet all that may be opposed to it. In John the opposition was religious and Jewish and moral too, all against the working of grace, but grace met these things to bring salvation to hearts that would receive it.

LMcF So in John 1 it says, "And looking at Jesus as he walked", v 36. This is a practical thing; it came into expression as He walked. It says, "Behold the Lamb of God". Then there were two who heard him and wanted to be with Him. What we are speaking of is very attractive, is it not?

RT It is: I think it is to attract us and to form us. As you say, John saw something so different about Him—"Behold the Lamb of God" and "a glory as of an only-begotten with a father". He saw something new coming into those circumstances of life in which men were and he is impressed with the fulness of it. And he says, We have received, the disciples received something. You can see that they were drawn into it; the Lord brings them into the fulness of it later. But John was attracted as to something of this fulness, enough to follow Him.

GDR The saints come into the great gain of what is royal; you said it has its source in royalty. But as we apprehend it for ourselves, is it displayed in the reflection of Christ in the saints? In your part of the world the Queen has what they call grace and favour; there is something of a dispensation of full supply coming from that source, is there not? Would you say something as to grace and truth subsisting?

RT There is a footnote to that word, see John 1: 17. It is quite a long one, but at the end of it, it says, grace has appeared and 'its so taking place supposes its continuance'. That is a very fine note that grace having come in in Christ it is going through to the rapture. It supposes its continuance because of the One of whose fulness we have all received, and,

as you say, it is also seen in persons who themselves become marked by royalty. The appeal and the formation of it would preserve us from falling below the level of what is true for the dispensation.

JS Is the thought of grace an operating principle? Is this not really the beginning of divine operations in the earth, and grace a great operating principle to bring about a result for divine pleasure?

RT I think that is a good way to put it that it is the operating principle. Had He used law we would have been shut out. It is very affecting the way it is put, "grace and truth"; we see it in the woman in John 8, do we not? If truth had been first she would have been condemned, but you see there grace and truth, "Neither do I condemn thee". Truth is maintained but grace was shown, grace was first. As you say it is the method in which divine love is operating today. Truth is never sacrificed, but there is grace there to keep us in the realm of the truth and to keep us livingly in the truth in contrast to its becoming a dead letter.

EFC The Spirit is referred to too as the Spirit of grace, Heb 10: 29. Is He not the One who helps us to augment the expression of grace in the saints? Like the oil that comes down in Psalm 133 upon Aaron's head and down to his feet. The Spirit would help us, would He not, to continue this display of grace?

RT I think so. It is in His power that it subsists and continues, as you say. What we are reading in John 1, and what has followed from the death of Christ, has made room for a dispensation of grace, and that involved another divine Person coming here, the Holy Spirit of God, to maintain the level of the dispensation, and more than that, to maintain the saints at the level of the dispensation.

EFC It is very serious to do despite to the Spirit of grace (which expression is in the context in Hebrews).

RT We may come to the practical side of that later, but there is need, I think, of just being attracted that grace has been established, never to be set aside. God has established

it in a Person; He has established it in the economy, that grace reigns. Whatever arises in the dispensation there is grace to preserve us on the level that divine love has purposes.

HGH Grace is really a part of an expression of love, is it not? It is through grace, through truth, we come to know God who is love.

RT It says, "ye saved by grace, through faith", Eph 2: 8. Grace is a great operating principle. Love is His nature, but it is the way that God's love has expressed itself in our time, in grace in a Man; and in the economy God has expressed Himself in grace that there may be in this dispensation a vessel formed in which in the day to come He will display the glory of His grace.

HGH So the law in a sense demanded it: Love thy neighbour as thyself?

RT Yes, but grace has brought in the way in which it can be effected, has it not?

HGH It is like a commodity from God, is it not?

RT Well, it is how He has come out, no demanding but grace is supplying. I suppose the new covenant (into which Israel will come) is an expression of it, in a sense. But in our day it has come in, it has appeared and it subsists through the dispensation in the One in whom its fulness is expressed. "Of his fulness we all have received, and grace upon grace". It is a continuing thing through the dispensation; the grace that we have received today, and in the exercises that we have had it is to form us so that there is another addition to it, "grace upon grace".

HJG Would verse 18 show us that it could not come by any other, "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him". It could not come any other way than through that One.

RT That is very beautiful. I was impressed in this scripture with the relationship that lies behind the outshining of grace; "as of an only-begotten", and the "only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father". That is where it finds its source, is

it not? A very fine expression that, "the bosom of the Father", and that is where the Son lived as this gospel speaks about Him. Our brother referred to the Son of man, but the Son of man who is in heaven, a stranger here in the circumstances of men, but displaying a character that belonged to heaven and had its source in the Father's bosom.

CFD So while grace is on the throne—grace reigns—it is through the principle of righteousness. So that grace is operating, shining out, the glory of it. We sometimes sing,

> O the glory of the grace,
> Shining in the Saviour's face! (Hymn 438)

It is all there, but underlying it is righteousness. Would that be right?

RT Yes, and I wondered if the righteousness in that setting may be an allusion to the death of Christ. In Romans you are struck with the abundance of grace. John speaks of the fulness of grace upon grace, but Romans brings it into the scene of need and speaks about the free gift in grace and the abundance of grace, and grace reigning, as the fruit of the death of Christ. It says in Hebrews, "so that by the grace of God he should taste death for every thing", Heb 2: 9. So that grace is shining out, you may say, in a greater fulness today than it did even when the Lord was here in the days of His flesh. His death has laid the foundation in righteousness that grace may shine out in its abundance in a scene of sin and upon sinners that we may come into this blessed realm of eternal life.

CFD So "where sin abounded grace has overabounded". It is wonderful to see how the overabounding of grace has covered everything to meet the righteousness of God.

RT If we think of that expression for a moment that "by the grace of God he should taste death", what love was behind that, but what an outshining of grace. I think that that is where the foundation in righteousness was laid, so that grace can reign. Righteousness has not been sacrificed. It brings a certain substantiality into the thought of grace. Grace is not something that men would call weakness. I think the power

of grace is that He who tasted death has laid a basis in righteousness in the laying down of His life that in resurrection there may be a reign of grace, persons brought under its reign to enjoy the great thoughts that were in the heart of God for us.

JAP It was one of the greatest glories of David's kingdom when he said, "I will shew kindness", 2 Sam 10: 2. A great administration took place there and brethren were recovered through it, were they not?

RT I think you see it very beautifully in David as a type. Whatever came in, in the main he fell back on his links with God—another spirit. It is said about some of the other worthies that they had another spirit in them. I think grace would form us in that so that when we come to Romans it speaks of the overabounding character of it. The free gift can never be earned or be merited, but it is shining out from the throne in all its blessed fulness. As we said earlier, whether it is to Corinth or Ephesus, it is shining in its fulness because it has its source in the heart of God and His love.

CFD Would you say a word as to "so also grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"? "To eternal life"—how does that work through?

RT I think in the setting in Romans it is to make you superior to the influences of death that are around. Paul is dealing in the chapter with what has come into the race and the bondage that has come in, but I think that grace reigning through righteousness brings us into an area that is beyond the bondage of death. What would you say about it?

CFD I think that is very helpful because "to eternal life" would suggest an atmosphere into which the person comes where there is the operation of grace through righteousness. So it is "to eternal life". Do you think that behind that is the suggestion that it is something that is entered into and enjoyed by the person where these features are functioning?

RT Yes; I think grace brings us into a realm where another kind of life is enjoyed. The law brought in death and bondage, but grace reigning, and the free gift and abundance of grace,

persons come out in another character which finds its life in this area of eternal life, superior to the limitations and the bondage of death that lies upon the race. So it is through Jesus Christ our Lord.

JS Do you think Mephibosheth is one who was formed by grace?

RT Yes; the teaching will come out in persons in the way they have been marked by it. I thought that in this reading we would get some impression of fulness, the wealth that is continuing through the dispensation, that whatever the circumstances, however long the dispensation or whatever sorrows have to be met, grace is reigning, there is grace to meet whatever circumstance may arise.

LMcF So the character is seen in the assembly at Antioch: they were called Christians. I suppose this feature of grace could be seen.

RT Did Barnabas not see it, it says "seeing the grace of God", Acts 11: 23? I wonder what he saw? What would he see?

LMcF He saw it in persons.

RT Did he see persons there who were not envious of one another, persons who were not projecting themselves? He saw the grace of God: he saw another character. It brings out the formative side that we are speaking of, the substantiality of it in persons. It is very fine that he looked on the brethren and put that name upon them, Christians as you say. He did not just say, he is a fine brother, or, he has nice manners, or whatever, but he saw the grace of God shining in persons.

DMW There would have been something peculiar with them, a peculiar people as we had in Titus.

RT Very good. They could not be understood by worldlings; they could not understand the lack of ambition about them and the lack of aspiring after worldly goods and these things. They were living on another principle, were they not? He saw something there that proceeded from the glory, proceeded from God, had its source in the Father.

JMcI These persons would form a beautiful base for the glad tidings to go forth.

RT Yes. It gives substantiality to them, does it not? It is the effect of the glad tidings in persons. They have received the free gift. So that it makes nothing of us: it proceeds from God as a free gift in its abundance whatever the circumstances and the state, to form a character that has its origin, produced as we have said by the Spirit, in what has come from heaven.

EFC So that the atmosphere in which we are today is probably the best place we could be to touch the essence of eternal life, do you think?

RT I think it has been said that the enjoyment of eternal life involves the brethren and it is that grace might reign to eternal life. Eternal life in a sense is an atmosphere, is it not?

EFC It is a remarkable system of relationship and being, an out-of-the-world condition of things.

RT A heavenly order of relationship and being. It is something entirely foreign to the world, and it is formed in persons. It is an atmosphere that grace has produced in which growth can take place and breathe freely, you may say, the atmosphere of eternal life.

SEMacC To know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, John 17: 3.

RT That is the eternal life. I remember that it was said that persons were trying to say that eternal life was the name of a person. But the truth is a Person is it, He is the true God and eternal life; it shines in a Person. So does grace, it is radiating from a living Person, and the Person is God and yet come into manhood's condition that there may be a flow and an understanding of this fulness of grace.

SEMacC Is that also seen in Joseph; he was in charge of the supply and second only to Pharaoh, but what supply he had for his brethren, and for all of Egypt too.

RT There was a fulness that the famine could not exhaust. The famine tested the resources but there were resources with

Joseph as they went to him. I think, as you said, these brethren come eventually to receiving grace upon grace. Well, has it reached us? It is to have this formative character about it. Is there something built up in us of this other character, that we are here in the enjoyment of what has come into display?

ASH Is there beauty attached to it? It speaks of the gift of grace. There is nothing but the love of Christ attached to it, it is free.

RT Very beautiful. The way He has displayed it reveals God's heart that when man could do nothing, grace has provided everything, that we may come into the atmosphere in which God would have us to live.

JAP The elder son said, "Behold, so many years I serve thee, and never have I transgressed a commandment of thine; and to me hast thou never given a kid that I might make merry with my friends: but when this thy son, who has devoured thy substance with harlots, is come, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. But he said to him, Child, *thou* art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine. But it was right to make merry and rejoice, because this thy brother was dead and has come to life again, and was lost and has been found", Luke 15: 29-32. We do try to earn this; we have to judge that.

RT I think it is good to call attention to that: we cannot earn it. The younger son received something that was greater, the robe, the ring and the shoes. What a display of grace, the father coming out with the resources of his love to make the son suitable for the house. I think that is what grace would do; it makes us assembly persons. It brings us into this area of eternal life of which we have spoken, but it brings us into assembly character and features so that we are at home among the brethren, in the enjoyment of what flows from God. It is not something we can work up to, but grace has had a formative effect upon the saints so that we are at home with one another in the enjoyment of divine love.

GA I was thinking of Matthew 5, "for he makes his sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust. For if ye

should love those who love you, what reward have ye?", vv 45, 46. God's grace is giving the opportunity for all men to adjust themselves, would you say?

RT Yes, His goodness comes into it; it is there for all men. But He would specially have us to be affected by the grace that comes to each of us individually. Paul had it; he said, "By God's grace I am what I am", 1 Cor 15: 10. He did not fall back on his abilities in dealing with the brethren, not even in dealing with Festus and Agrippa, but he called attention in a sense to what the grace of God had formed in him, "by God's grace" set out in Paul before these monarchs was irresistible. Agrippa says, You almost persuade me, as seeing there the formative effect of grace in Paul. I have always been impressed that Paul falls back on what grace has wrought in him and not on his own abilities in those difficult times.

KNP From that standpoint can you think of grace as being victorious? There is something wrought there in persons who have an appreciation of how grace has come in and come to them. That should be so with us, should it not?

RT Yes. I think we need help to realise that grace will not run out; it is reigning, it is on the throne. However long the dispensation and however difficult the times may be, every circumstance that may arise in the dispensation is to be met in the power of grace rather than in the power of what is academic or what is legal. These things have worked in the recovery, and have brought in a good deal of sorrow and confusion, but I think things are to be met in the power of grace reigning, and that this power working would save the brethren.

GDR Would you think that the result of all this is to bring in this wonderful principle of peace? You referred to peace and the conditions in which we can gather at such an occasion, and our relationships happy and free, but peace flows out from this, does it not, the peace of the Christ presiding in our hearts, Col 3: 15?

RT Yes, I think so. It makes way for enjoyment of the assembly, and the assembly in its totality will be seen as a

great vessel of grace. But then the personnel of it are formed in the true grace of God to be displaying the features of the heavenly Man.

KAK I was thinking of the way the assembly picks up on this and stimulates divine Persons in regard to further grace. Abraham could beseech for Lot, having been a recipient of it: Abigail meeting David, and others. It may be anticipating something of what you have before you, but I was thinking of the way in which the supply goes on.

RT I think that is very fine. It is not just something that comes in for an emergency, but it is reigning. It is a predominant, governing principle and I think it issues in administration. I think it makes administrators. Romans, I think, would be doing that, making administrators who are formed in the true grace of God as having proved the abundance of it and the richness of it, they themselves are coming out in this heavenly character.

PEM Do we see that in David? He says, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul", 2 Sam 9: 1. After all David had been through, I might have wanted revenge.

RT Yes, a wonderful opportunity to vindicate himself, was it not? These things crop up in our own lives at times and in the history of the assembly, but the assembly is able to fall back on this heavenly grace that has appeared and fills the dispensation; it says that it might reign through righteousness. The reigning of it would suggest that it is the first thing, it is the dominating principle. As we have seen it was in the Lord, and so it is reigning in the dispensation through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is not reigning through a text or what we know, but it is a living, well-known Person, Jesus Christ our Lord. So we are under His authority; we are not in liberty to impose our own principles and our own way of dealing with things, but we are under the authority of the Lord, and under responsibility, too, to display what is reigning and what marks the throne as we ourselves have been formed in it.

CFD Do you think that that shines out in a remarkable way in Stephen in the Acts? Before he said anything, the Spirit of God records that those in the council saw his face as the face of angel, Acts 6: 15. Right in that council he was bringing the expression of grace that he really got in heaven, do you think?

RT I think he is a beautiful example of the display of grace and truth. He did not minimise matters but at the end of what he said he bows down, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". What an indictment to the nation was Stephen's testimony, and what an effect it had on Saul, it seems. He was affected by the grace of that man who in the presence of such opposition, perhaps unparalleled since the time of the Lord, there is one who comes out in His features, kneeling down—"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". Well, that is shining through the dispensation. It is striking, in looking at some of the martyrs' history, how many of them quoted the words of Stephen at the end of their lives. Time and again as they were being persecuted and their life was ebbing out, many of them quoted Stephen's words, "Lay not this sin to their charge". So what an indictment God is going to have against the lawlessness of man: there has been displayed in persons something of the grace of Christ shining out in conditions of adversity.

DMW Do you think the Lord, who set forth everything perfectly here as the exponent of grace, was standing and ready as the source of it to help Stephen in grace do that? He looked into an open heaven and saw his Lord standing and he drew on the source of grace and was able to say those beautiful words.

RT It is very beautiful that he should say that he saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing. He brings that into expression. It was not only for his own soul, as if he was telling those people that the Lord was there ready to bless them. He was there standing in all His grace, supporting His servant, no doubt, to come out in that character, but too an indictment to the nation that the One whom they had crucified was there displaying in His servant His attitude toward them. And think of Peter's preaching, three thousand saved at once,

just days after they had crucified the Lord of glory, three thousand persons saved. What an outshining of the abundance of grace!

PEM "Having fixed his eyes on heaven", it says. What a view Stephen had of the Originator of that wonderful grace!

RT Well, it is a good word for us as to our eyes—are they fixed on the source? We look at the difficult days and at the persons, but as you say, he fixed his eyes on heaven. So that our eyes are fixed on where grace is reigning, on the throne, on the source of grace that we may draw the needed supplies day by day to come out in our measure in His character.

GDP I do not know whether it fits in with your subject, but I was thinking of the parable of the talents. One said, Thy talent has produced another talent, and so forth, but one said, "I knew thee that thou art a hard man", and he lost everything, did he not?

RT I think that is very good. So that he did not know his master. I think there is a fine touch in what has been said, that not only are we brought to know the grace of God, but we are brought to know the God of grace. There is a lot in that remark, but we not only know what has shone out but we are brought to know the Person in whom it has shone out. That was the difference in these men, one of them knew the God of grace and he fitted himself to rule in the coming kingdom, so that the features and the formation of grace in us now is going to have its time of display. God is forming administrators in His grace in view of that coming day. So that is what we have here in Romans, that it is through Jesus Christ our Lord we know the source of the grace.

NEW YORK

3rd November 1995

List of initials at the end of the fifth reading

GRACE—II

John 20: 15-31; 21: 1-15

RT I think that in the passage we have read there is a very fine demonstration of grace upon grace. We were speaking in the last reading of how grace appeared in the incarnation; there is a certain touch in the passage we have read now of the fulness in resurrection, in these words to His own, "my Father and your Father, and … my God and your God". I think that in the forty days, as other scriptures amplify it, the Lord leaves an impression of the fulness of grace and how it is flowing. The disciples here are somewhat bewildered and into those circumstances the Lord comes with these precious words. As John records it, it is the third time—three distinct occasions of grace upon grace. There was nothing to draw it out save the fulness that was in His own heart towards them. I thought that we might look at these things briefly, that there may be some impression left on our spirits of grace operating through the dispensation. We have the first manifestation of grace operating in regard to privilege; in regard to Thomas grace operating in circumstances of unbelief; the third time grace operating in recovery. That more or less covers the features that come up in the dispensation and would reassure our hearts as to what we have said already of grace reigning, the power of it coming into these circumstances. The Lord as risen would give them this touch that His Father was their Father—what grace! He had a right to that place, you may say, but grace would give us to know the Father's name and the Father's love, and to live in that enjoyed relationship in which grace would place us. The passage itself is so rich that we need hardly say much about it, but the wealth of it may touch our hearts as to "of his fulness we all have received, and grace upon grace".

HGH Would you go over those three things? The last two were Thomas—unbelief—and then recovery: what was the first one?

RT Privilege. I think that is how the Lord would encourage us. So you may say it is Lord's day. What grace we enjoy in that time of privilege! The next one was eight days after—unbelief with some, yet there is grace that meets those

problems. Then we have divisive activities, grace meets them—grace upon grace flowing from the risen Man. It is always very interesting to think of the Lord continuing here forty days to reassure the disciples of what was coming in in this dispensation, founded on His death but we may say based on His resurrection. He has gone into an area where sin and death have nothing to say to Him; He is superior to it all and He is bringing the wealth of heaven and the relationships of heaven to these disciples in the circumstances in which they are.

JAP Is it your thought that, in the privileged position, grace is supreme in the assembly? Would the Lord mean that? It is the vessel where it is expressed at the present time? In our experience it is grace to me first and to each one, but here it is to the company. Maybe you would open that up.

RT What struck me in the passage was that it is the Lord, it is grace coming from Him. He imparts it to the company, and they come out in some of the features of grace. It is John who says, It is the Lord. Nobody else could show grace like this. How full it is, that it gives us a place with the Father! Our hearts, enriched with that, enable us not only to enjoy grace but to come out in grace because we have a place before the Father. The Lord said to the disciples as they came back from their service, "rejoice that your names are written in the heavens", Luke 10: 20. This is even more than that, My Father and your Father.

JS Grace would always draw persons to the source of it.

RT Beautiful. Go on.

JS Does it not show here that it has its source in the purpose of God?

RT I think that is very fine. I think that is where grace has come from; it has appeared. As we have said, it met those circumstances of bondage and sin but the great end of it was that we should enjoy our place before the Father; "my Father and your Father". You can hardly think of greater words of grace than that, giving us a place, His place, before the Father.

EFC The message was to be conveyed by Mary of Magdala out of whom He had cast seven demons. What a trophy of grace she was and yet, I suppose, she merged with the company!

RT That is very fine: you can see the effects of grace in her that she was able to take such a message. It seems here that they believed her. There is something substantial of grace in her, not only the message; but I think what you have said is helpful, that there had been a work of grace in her that she was such that could convey the message to Peter and John and the others.

LMcF What is to be learned from the fact the Lord said to Mary, "Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to my Father"? Just open that up please for us.

RT Much could be said about it, but I think, in the circumstances of which we are speaking, it would bear the application that we allow grace to have its full work. We may limit grace to our needs and to our circumstances and pressures, but I think the Lord in saying "Touch me not" would convey something to her to allow grace to have its full work, to work out into full result, that not only would she be comforted but that grace would give her a sense of her place before the Father. It is a very fine thing to be comforted, and to enjoy grace meeting our circumstances, but how much more to come into an area of things that only grace could have purposed. She could never have thought about a message like this—or any of the disciples—but, as was said, it links us with purpose. Allow grace to have its full work, allow the Lord to say it all; we may just say we have the word and we are comforted, but grace would bring us to a fulness, would it not?

LMcF So He goes on to say, "but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father …". So the brethren are in view.

RT What a rallying call! They had gone away in deep sorrow. In this whole section, there is a great tendency with the disciples to go back, and we know that in our hearts, but what a rallying call of grace comes in the Lord's words to bring us on to true ground, to this elevation of grace, "my Father and

your Father". What an uplifting and gathering effect it had upon the disciples, this wonderful message!

CFD Earlier in this gospel the Lord refers to children of God and then in chapter 15 He says, I call you no longer bondmen ... but I have called you friends (v 15), but now in resurrection He says, "my brethren". That gets us on to a beautiful area, does it not?

RT Beautiful. I think that is to allow grace to have its perfect work. How far grace will carry us—beyond our expectations to come into this intimacy; as you say, not only friends but "my brethren" is character. In these services of the Lord, He forms something of the character in the disciples that grace can produce.

CFD Does it suggest the idea of order, one thing children, another thing friends, but this is brethren? Does it suggest that there is coming to light now here in testimony those who are of His order?

RT I think that is what grace would work out to, and that, as we allow grace to have its perfect work and enjoy privilege and have some sense of the great thoughts of grace, it would help us to come out in this character. We spoke in the reading of grace being formative: the Lord has seen something of that in these disciples. There were other features there but He saw something, I think, that was formed of grace in them so that He calls them "my brethren". And Mary knew to whom to go.

RBH Would you say something about this title, "the Lord? Every time that one refers to Him, that is the way it is presented.

RT I do not think it is exactly the way in which we normally speak of it to stress His authority, but I think it is to stress His supremacy, the supremacy of love and supremacy of grace. What would you say?

RBH Yes, it is what is seen in Him; "bringing word to the disciples that she had seen the Lord" and "the disciples rejoiced therefore, having seen the Lord", and then John recognised Him and he says, "It is the Lord".

RT As if it could not be anybody else. Who else would have spoken like this to disappointed souls? Who else would have come in like this to Thomas and to those persons who were going away in their own wills? Only the Lord. So John says, "It is the Lord". I think there has been ministry, the Lord discerned by His features. That is what we have here: they did not know it was He, they did not recognise Him, but as they saw grace upon grace, they said, it could not be anybody else, it is the Lord.

GDR Would it be the working of the administration of love that she answers to that? As was said, it was her own words, she had seen the Lord. It is really full authority in love, would you say?

RT Yes, I think it is. I think the way it is used here it is a term of endearment. She does not need to say 'Jesus'; it is the Lord. They knew who the Lord was and here He is in resurrection; the Lord of glory, the Lord of grace, you may say.

GDR She was to learn Him in that new way on resurrection ground. How fitting for Saul of Tarsus to say, "Who art thou, Lord?", Acts 9: 5. But then He showed Himself to him as Jesus. Is that not wonderful?

RT Yes.

EFC Would it suggest the thought of dominion? We need to recognise the Lord's dominical rights over us, do we not, particularly in relation to the Supper? It is the Lord's supper, not Jesus' supper; it is the Lord's supper.

RT Yes, it is dominical and I think the word supremacy, too, is good. It is the supreme One. It is not just emphasising authority, but it is the One who is over all, and He is over all in love, over all in grace.

HGH So it is really love's name; it is the name that they give Him out of love, would you think?

RT I think so. It is a distinguishing word, the Lord. There is only one Lord, "to us there is ... one Lord, Jesus Christ", 1 Cor 8: 6. She does not need to say any more, just "the Lord" and they would know who it was—lords many or gods many, but to us there is one Lord.

LDP "They have taken away my Lord" would that emphasise affection?

RT Yes, it would. The place which He has won through grace means that He is supreme. It is striking, as our brother quoted, that it comes in time and time again; there is no one else to whom this authority could be attached, and He exercises it in these touches of grace to bring us into the wealth of the dispensation.

JAP In this touch of grace the Lord uses a sister; the Lord would like to use the feminine side amongst us more. That is an impression I have been carrying for some time. We might not have selected this sister to give a message, but the Lord did. What grace there was in that!

RT I think, as has been said that she was available because she appreciated the work of grace in herself. That is what would bring out the feminine character, would it not, that we appreciate what grace has done for us? So she has no other lord, as has been said; He is my Lord. The feminine character reproduced as it was in the woman in Luke 7; she took the place at the feet of Jesus recognising what those feet would do for her. So that it produces this state that is serviceable for the message.

EFC Would you say something about the inside position here, from verse 19 and on?

RT What would you say about it?

EFC It was said that it involves others, the disciples being together and the Lord coming through closed doors, and into the midst—the dignity of 'the midst' as expressed in these humble disciples. That is just how it affected me as it was being read.

RT I think it is very affecting that the message should rally the brethren. The message from the ascending One, "my Father and your Father" I think that brings us into this area of privilege that the Lord is free to speak, He showed them His hands and His side. The Lord has great liberty in the brethren being together in the sense of their privileges, do you think?

EFC They were glad when they saw the Lord.

RT I remember being at a meeting once and a brother who had been out of fellowship was being received, and the brother giving out the notices said 'our brother has been restored to his privileges'. I thought there was a fine touch about that. The brother had been wandering, he had been away, but he came back to his privileges. And rising to our place of privilege gives the Lord wonderful opportunity to disclose the thoughts of His love, does it not? He showed them His hands and His side. What grace that He should give them this touch of peace and the Father! How much grace would unfold to us as we rise to the sense of our place in privilege.

DMW Have you had a thought as to why the Lord says, "Peace be to you" twice?

RT Maybe you have a better thought.

DMW I wondered if it had something to do with the message that the Lord gave Mary, My Father: My God. That Man would now be in a condition in which God could take great pleasure. So one would be the peace of God but the other might have to do with the relationship.

RT I think what you say is interesting, that it is what the Lord would bring in in a confirming, consolidating way as He comes among us—the substantiality of privilege. Privilege is not something theoretical or unreal, but I think the Lord saying these words of peace, as you say, would bring in the substantiality of what our place of privilege is.

HGH But it would also be setting forth grace upon grace.

RT I think so. I thought "of His fulness" connects John 1 with this closing section. You may say it is unlimited, the Lord is no longer in the limitations of the condition in which He was but in the glory of His Person He would bring them to rise above the circumstances here to know their privilege.

JS Would you say something more about what is characteristic, to which you referred earlier.

RT I think that the Lord here is forming character with them, giving them a sense that they have a place before the Father as His brethren, and then He breathed into them. "Receive the Holy Spirit", I think that to form character in

them, He gave the breath of the risen Man, how intimate it is. I think it is all in view of imparting to them something of the character that marks Him, grace that would give us power to be here in His features. What do you think?

JS I am glad of what you say. I am thinking of the quickening effect it has—to use Colossian language—into the power of His life. Do you think that is the way the power of His risen life is imparted to us? Is that the character that should mark persons who characteristically enjoy the privilege with Him where He is?

RT I think so, and it is coming out in grace upon grace, in varied circumstances. John says, It was already the third time, as if there is full testimony to what is going to fill the dispensation—it is the third time. Whatever comes up there is grace upon grace. But I think that we would be expanded as we have some sense of the place that grace has given us—nothing here, but everything there in Him, "my Father and your Father".

GDR As the Lord makes Himself known (as we would expect at the breaking of bread), it says here that they rejoiced having seen the Lord. Could you give us a touch as to rejoicing? I think there is a need of it. Would you agree?

RT Yes. It connects with what we have said already, "rejoice that your names are written in heaven". Rejoicing is based on something that does not change, no one could change that name that is written in heaven nor can change this, that My Father is your Father. It is fine to think that, to every one of us, the Lord in grace has given something that cannot be changed by time or circumstances. And what joy that produces in the soul as we are helped to enjoy it, does it not?

GDR It suggests that there was immediate recognition of Himself. We should not be cloudy as to the Lord's movements as He comes in at the Supper, would you say?

RT Yes, and our hearts ready for the impress of fulness that He brings in with Him, because what would give character to the occasion is what He brings with Him. As we have said

already, what He brings is the wealth of heaven, grace upon grace, different each time but full grace to meet whatever circumstances are there.

EFC So this impression received by the disciples was such that when it came to seeing Thomas the next time, they told him, We have seen the Lord. They did not lose that impression and it became the fulcrum, you might say, of Thomas' recovery, do you think?

RT Would that we could move towards one another in the full sense of our privileges and take something of that joy with us, as has been said. There was a man there who was a bit difficult and they do not try to go into the difficulties: they just say, We have seen the Lord. What an appeal that is going to have for every true believer, that we have seen the Lord!

EFC That is not presumption with these disciples and it should not be with us either as having to do with other believers who say, We have the Lord too. But the point is have we seen the Lord and can they convictingly say, We have seen the Lord.

RT It brings out that there is will working; it does not recover him immediately. Then it says, eight days after. There is time for what they have left with Thomas. Maybe they visited once, but they leave what they have conveyed and it worked something in him in those intervening days, and he is there the next time.

EFC I had always thought that that was the next Lord's day, but you think it is possibly the Monday?

RT It says eight days after. I think it is not exactly the normal character of a Lord's day.

EFC It has been suggested that it is suggestive of eternity, looking at it dispensationally.

RT It is dispensationally, but I think it bears the application that the Lord is able to meet the dispensational matter now. We meet many believers—I was speaking to one the other day—and they say we will be all right when the Lord comes. But there is grace now to make it right. Thomas, as you say, is the dispensational side and he is really looking on to a

millennial day when the Lord will put everything right, but I think what the Lord brings in is that there is grace to put it right now, and we would like to be able to convey that, having seen the Lord, as you say, and rejoicing in a sense of privilege. But there is grace to put right now the unbelief that comes in and the distance that has come in between brethren.

JAP "The world to come", it says, "of which we speak"—it is a current matter. It struck me when the scripture was read that the Lord brings up the question of food—I am going a little ahead—but it seems to me that there are two things that encourage the brethren, one is the manifestation of the Lord Jesus among us and the other is that there is food. I noticed that in this divergent company they had no food.

RT That is all right. It is fine if the Lord goes ahead, is it not? He says the third time, "after these things Jesus manifested himself again". How grace keeps at it—that is what impresses you. Whatever comes into the circumstances, grace keeps at it. And the Lord does not give up, He shows grace upon grace. The way He meets the thing is a beautiful education for us; He meets it with some fresh touch of Himself.

HGH Would it not need grace on the part of the disciples to say nothing more than, "We have seen the Lord", and then grace on the part of the Lord to take up the matter?

RT And He says the same to Thomas, Peace to you, does He not? He still comes in peace. It is fine to be able to bring some wealth into the difficulties. We get overburdened and overwhelmed with the difficulties. But the Lord brings the wealth of grace to them, and His first word is "Peace". Again in the next instance He does not take up the difficulties; as our brother said He brings in food, He brings something positive into the circumstances to bring in the adjustments.

LMcF Would you say something about the in-breathing. Is that the Spirit of the ascended Man?

RT I think so. The time of privilege is not that He just gives us a touch and we go away again, but I think the in-breathing forms something in character. We spoke about grace forming; I think the in-breathing has a great deal to do with character

because they keep breathing like this. That breath fills their lungs with a sense of the privilege we have, that His Father is our Father. So when it comes to dealing with Thomas they do not speak down to him, but they just say, We have seen the Lord. What volume there is in those words!

CFD It says, "The disciples rejoiced therefore, having seen the Lord". That rejoicing would not be left, they would carry it with them, would they not? And before they come together, eight days later, the Spirit is brought in so that, when Thomas assembles with the brethren, he sees those that are rejoicing and the effect of the Spirit in them. This is going to bring out something that would be very substantial. Do you think that anything from this dispensation will be carried over in that way into the coming dispensation, when Israel is recovered?

RT I think Israel will learn from the assembly, indeed the angels will learn from it. As the chapter goes on, I think the Lord is forming administrators in view of the world to come, He is forming them in the grace of the dispensation. I think the rejoicing is maintained through the breathing; He gives them a touch and it is maintained as He breathed into them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit". There is power to maintain the joy at its true level.

CFD That would come into the matter of administration? The idea of remission comes in and then that of retaining, but it would all be in the sense of the continuity of rejoicing and the power of the Spirit of God that would set them up in administrative power, do you think?

RT So you have to be a wealthy person to remit, have you not? You have to be satisfied yourself. That is what the Lord would have us to be, satisfied. Think of Naphtali, Satisfied with favour, it says, full of blessing (Deut 33: 23), a man who was content with his portion. It is a man like that that can remit. If we are not satisfied and full of favour we will be demanding. But here are persons who are satisfied with favour, and as you say, the first thing is, Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted. That is the first character, the first thought, that comes up.

ASH The spirit of unbelief that Thomas had was broken when the Lord spoke to him. Then it says, "Thomas answered and said to him, My Lord and my God", not only my Lord but my God. Is that on a higher level than the others? It was said that each one spoke of the Lord as 'my Lord', but Thomas here says, My Lord and my God.

RT I think recovery always has the full thing in view, and Thomas comes on to the true ground. I think the others had perhaps more than Thomas, but I think in the application of it, taking it out of its dispensational side, it would be that recovery brings us on to full ground, that we come not only to know, as we said in the last reading, the grace of God, but we come to know the God of grace. We come to know His Person and His Deity, that grace resides there in all its fulness.

DMW Do you think his name had anything to do with his absence? The disciples had the doors shut, they were providing conditions so that the Lord could be free to come, but I wonder If sometimes we are not like Thomas; while we may be with the brethren, morally we are really not. We take on the character of what is natural and are not abstracting ourselves from that, so we are not enjoying or rejoicing as others might be. It would affect us when they say, Did we not have a wonderful time this morning, and you sometimes have to say, Well, I missed something. The Lord would come in then with His own touch, perhaps during the week, to ready us up for the next time.

RT Yes. The place that privilege gives us is far more than the twin. Thomas had just missed the idea of privilege and he fell back on something that was near to him. There is, throughout this whole section, a danger of falling back. And that was Galatia, they fell from grace. I think Thomas missed the idea of the message that My Father is your Father. What could be higher than that? As you say, I think something just pulled him away from the enjoyment of the fulness of privilege that is enjoyed among the brethren. Privilege is enjoyed among the saints.

GDR Would you say that the Lord would have the moral state rise to what is privilege? There is often disparity, but the

Lord's mind is that they should not only enjoy it for the moment but be continually enjoying it, and that is the result of the Spirit.

RT I think the in-breathing gives us the power to be maintained in the rejoicing, so that what we have in privilege is a real thing to us. The Spirit would help us, as Mr Darby says—

> Here we walk as sons through grace (Hymn 88)

That is how we walk, as sons. I think the in-breathing is character here to maintain the joy of privilege. It is beautiful then the way the Lord comes to Thomas, He says, "see my hands; and bring thy hand and put it into my side; and be not unbelieving, but believing". The Lord for the moment, we may say, goes back a bit. He knows how to touch us, does He not? If we have wandered, He knows just how to touch the heartstrings that bring us back to My Lord and My God.

HJG Another time with His disciples He said, "It is I myself", Luke 24: 39. Is that really what He is doing to Thomas?

RT Very good. Yes it is. On that occasion as well, it is Himself, no one else—the substantiality of what He would do. Maybe the Lord has to go back upstream in our histories at times to revive us and bring us back into the depths of His love that is expressed in His hands and His side.

GDP Is there something on the privilege side in being among those who have not seen but have believed? Is that some special privilege, or am I wrong about that?

RT No, tell us more about it.

GDP Well, is it not wonderful, as you say, the way the Lord recovers Thomas, but think of being called blessed because we believe and have not seen. Is that right?

RT Yes. It is emphasising the assembly. Thomas represents the Jews, as we speak of the dispensational side of things, and they will come into things eventually; Paul says, "What their reception but life from among the dead?" Rom 11: 15. They will come into it. But in the meantime another family has come in that has come into the blessedness of believing

through grace and they have come into this wonderful privilege and favour; "My Father and your Father ... my God and your God".

JS The Lord speaks earlier as to "my peace" and "my joy". Do you think that is the level of things? Should we settle for less than that?

RT Should we?

JS I do not think so.

RT There is what our brother said about the twin—that is settling for something less, something that is below the level of where the Lord has placed us. He has placed us beyond any privilege of nature, He has given us the position as His brethren in those highest courts and now He has given us the in-breathing to maintain the joy of all that grace has given us in privilege. So it is very fine then how He acts in this third appearing—recovery, and perhaps that is the day we are in. The Lord manifests Himself. The chapter does not begin by the failure, it begins by the manifestation. It says, "After these things Jesus manifested himself", as if that is what is to be left with us, the way the Lord has acted in recovering grace to bring us into this true position in which grace would place us.

HGH The last two verses of the previous chapter would set forth grace to make believers out of believers and this chapter, being an addition to the gospel, would be another grace, would it not?

RT I think it is a very particular application to the present time. As you say, the thing was complete in a sense. And then John, being the last of the writers as we believe, adds this other one, as if to say that this is what is going on through the dispensation, grace acting in recovery that nothing is lost. Indeed there is a great haul of fishes, a hundred and fifty-three fishes—grace upon grace.

LDP Grace should help us in our relations with one another so that we would be an expression of the features of Christ.

RT It is very gracious the way the Lord handles them, is it not? He knew they were cold, He knew they were hungry, but He just says, "Have ye anything to eat? They answered him,

No". The Lord would act to recover us as we are true and acknowledge our true state; it makes way for the wealth of grace. How often we cover up, to try perhaps to support the position we have got into, but it is fine just to be simple and make room for what the Lord would do to bring us back.

JS Would this involve the teaching of grace, do you think? These sections of which we have spoken, beginning with Mary and Thomas, and then the disciples, involved adjustment but it was through grace. I was carrying forward the thought of Rabboni, my Teacher. The Lord views us individually on this principle, does He not?

RT Very good, to bring us to be at home collectively, is it not? So they went away following someone else, their eye off Christ. It is very fine how grace handles the situation, not through getting involved and immersed in difficulty—why did you do this and why did you do that, but He just asks, Have ye anything to eat? He exposed the whole thing in those few words, did He not, and they just say, No.

PEM Grace embodied in an invitation, "Come and dine". Is the Lord still saying, Come, do you think?

RT It is an experience, I think, that most of us have had, that while we have been doing our own will and have lost our way, the Lord has been maintaining things for us to come back to. So that is what has happened, that is what recovery is, we come back to the position that the Lord and the Spirit have maintained. So they come to dine, as you say.

LMcF He says, "Children, have ye anything to eat?" The note says, 'little children'. That is very fine, the Lord is not perturbed or angry with them despite their waywardness. That is the spirit He intends that should carry on at the present time.

RT Yes, I think so. That superiority of grace we are brought to, the Lord acting in that way. So He would bring us back under control. We may get out of control a bit—in our thoughts and ways—but as soon as they say, No, He says, "Cast the net at the right side of the ship". As we come under His touch there is a great haul, great wealth, brought in. So

the dispensation has been maintained by Christ and by the Spirit in spite of our waywardness.

JAP It would be grace and truth now, would it? They prospered when the Lord said that.

RT That is very good. They come under control. They had been out of control, Peter and Thomas. We have known some of these things; "l go to fish". You say, Well, Peter is doing it, it is all right for to do it. But they were out of control. So He brings them back under His touch and they come into the wealth, and fulness of grace, do they not?

GDR When we take our eyes off the Lord, persons become out of character. It is Simon Peter here, the responsible man, but he is out of character. Then the responsibility in the others as to following. Do we not need to test matters as to whether they have their source in the Lord Himself?

RT Yes. But it is very fine, the Lord does not leave them there and He has not left us in the circumstances that we may have been in. But in His grace He would bring us back, under the influence of His love to come into this position where there is plenty. The younger son was referred to in the previous reading and he comes into this in a sense, into the place where there is wealth and joy.

CFD The power of discernment seems to be with love. First of all it says here that the disciples did not know it was Jesus. but then the disciple whom Jesus loved said, It is the Lord. Do you think that shows that affection gives us that affinity which would relate all of us to Christ?

RT Yes. It says, "it is good that the heart be confirmed with grace, not meats", Heb 13: 9. I think there is a touch of that with John, that his heart there was confirmed that it could not be anybody else—it was the Lord. As we go on our own way, we become insensitive to what is suitable to the Lord. The bride in the Canticles did not discern him at first, she got into circumstances where she did not really recognise him. We have known something of that. But the Lord in His grace is ever the same, and as you say, it touches a chord eventually in their heart and one says, It is the Lord. How quickly Peter

comes into that too, does he not? So we have been thankful for one and another in our histories who have been able to see where the Lord was. The Lord does not leave them until they have been fully nourished. They come into something that grace had provided when they were on their fruitless mission. It is very affecting to think that in times when we have been away the Lord has been working on His own at this fire of coals and fish laid on it and bread. You are impressed with the warmth and substantiality of what grace is doing, are you not?

CFD The net does not break. Everything is secured It is a suggestion of a marvellous side of recovery which I suppose will be publicly seen in a coming day, but goes on now in the hearts of His own.

RT I think that is beautiful, the power of grace that the net does not break. The wealth that it has secured is all brought in, it is all housed, as you may say, there is nothing lost but it is all gathered in. And then we come to what we need, warmth and food. It is fine to think of the warmth and the food that grace provides.

JS The Lord is also thinking of food for the household; to follow a little further where you read, He is bringing out the thought of what is to come, the coming generations going right through to the completion of the age, do you think?

RT Yes. In this experience He is putting them on firm ground in view of their place of service. Peter boasted a bit when he said, If all forsake you I will not, but the Lord brings him to see, I think, that we stand in grace, we stand not in any strength that we have but as of the strength which grace supplies I think there is a certain substantiality about a fire of coals, it lasts and is a very penetrating heat; you can imagine them being warmed and fed and revived. It is a wonderful thing that grace serves to revive us, is it not.

CFD And the Lord is doing it all. The disciples are being helped into the flow; there are the coals as you say, but when it comes to the bread and the fish, He gives it to them, He is feeding them and setting them up, as they should be set up, in resurrection?

RT So this appendix is very fine. The Lord would not leave them without their being established in grace. That is what grace is, what He has done. What we have done led one way but grace brings us on to solid ground, to the enjoyment of the warmth and the food that He provides.

GDR There is no reproach in His beautiful language—such delicacy, Come and dine. You can hardly think of anything more attractive. Is it something of a lesson book for us as we learn from Him as we speak to one another: a lovely touch, Come and dine.

RT I think there is a certain dignity about grace. It acts in a very dignified way. As you say about the crown, they speak of her gracious Majesty. It requires majesty to set out grace. As we said already, a pauper or a beggar could never set out grace exactly, it requires great resource and wealth. Here you have the resources of grace acting to set us up in the dignity and the proper height of our calling. So then He takes Peter and He says, "Lovest thou me more than these?" Here the probing comes in, but He feeds them first. We would have gone the other way about but this is grace and truth; He feeds them, He warms them and now He says to Peter, Well, what about this, Peter? He does not say, You boasted, or You said this or that, He just says, "Lovest thou me more than these?" What could Peter say?

CFD What the Lord brings out is the secret of attachment. It is love, but what the Lord is going to get through to is attachment. Peter will get through to it eventually and is that what the Lord is working at with ourselves? Attachment goes a long way: it is almost, I should not say inconceivable, but it suggests that the person is firmly attached in the power of the Spirit to Christ.

RT And it is beautiful the way the Lord would have us attached. It is already the third time, he says, as if once was not enough, it is already the third time. It is as if the Lord would show us and leave us some impression of the fulness of grace that is in the dispensation. And I think as I said earlier here the Lord is forming administrators in view of His kingdom in the world to come. He is forming persons in the grace that

is needed to convey the wealth of heaven to the nations and other families. So we are in a time of these manifestations of grace.

RBH Is it as a result of this that Peter says, "I will use diligence, that after my departure ye should have also, at any time", 2 Pet 1: 15. He had the strong desire to leave something for their support.

RT That is very good. He wanted to give them the benefit of his experience, that they may stand. You can see the benefits Peter had from this experience, that he was a person trustworthy of the grace of God and able, as you say, to speak to these persons who were suffering in God's governmental ways, to convey something of this grace to them that they may stand and be supported in grace—he says It is not cleverly imagined fables, but something that has been proved as a reality in the way the Lord has acted and the way that He is acting through this whole dispensation. This is already the third time, as if the thing was continuing through the dispensation, the manifestations of grace to support us at the true height of our heavenly calling.

DMW Is the thought of the Lord's priesthood connected with this portion in your mind, supporting us in things relating to God?

RT Yes, I thought of that passage in Hebrews (chap 4: 16), that we may draw near to the throne of grace, in the time of need find support. There is mercy but we find grace in the circumstances that we may be maintained in the joy of our heavenly calling.

LMcF The Supper is essential—"Come and dine"—if we are to be maintained on the line on which you are speaking.

RT Yes, it is fine to get a touch in the meeting of something the Lord provides, is it not? As we come to the meeting we should have something, but what is formative is what the Lord brings in, what He has prepared. Think of His grace. While they were away on their own mission, here He is, a fire of coals. The coals had to be gathered. It is more difficult to light a fire of coals than a fire of wood, but He had it lit, it was blazing

there when they arrived, the fish was laid on it. Think of the Lord's preparations in His grace that we may come into what He sets on, and that is formative what He sets on.

NEW YORK

3rd November 1995

List of initials at the end of the fifth reading

GRACE—III

Titus 2: 11-15
Luke 5: 36-39
2 Kings 4: 1-7

RT We were speaking yesterday as to the grace of God that had appeared, and the fulness with which it has filled the dispensation with resources of grace to continue to the end. Today we may test ourselves as to how we are being formed by and making use of these resources. The scripture in Titus speaks of how we are to live in the present course of things. They are not going to change publicly; the present course of things is going to continue as it is. From the time that Paul wrote, the outward conditions and circumstances have not changed, but grace has come into them to affect us that we may be living piously, soberly and justly in the present time. The scripture in Luke would help us as to the kind of persons we are to be. The passage in Kings helps as to the use we are making of the resources that are available to maintain us in the enjoyment of what has come in in grace. We would carry in our minds the fulness of what we have received, grace upon grace. How is it affecting us? In the present course of things while we are awaiting another day, I think we are being formed in these features that are in keeping with grace. We remarked yesterday the warnings in the epistles as to falling from grace. Lack of appreciating grace would mean that we would be living in these worldly features it speaks of. But grace helps us to deny those things and to be formed in another character that has come in in the grace of God. I think the epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians would be in our minds as to how believers there had failed to make room for this grace, and it brought in bondage. Paul warned in these epistles of the danger of grace not having its full effect upon them. With these warnings in our minds, it may help us to take on these new features more readily in view of another world that is to be in our mind.

GDR Do you think the word 'teaching' is to lay hold of us? Paul spoke of some that they were always learning and never

able to come to the knowledge of the truth, 2 Tim 3: 7. Teaching coming into our places is essential, is it not?

RT Our brother spoke in prayer as to being receptive. The teaching could not be more attractive, as we were saying yesterday, in the way it has appeared—not appeared only for our admiration, as you say, but it would have an edge to it. It is to get into us and to be formative of these new features derived from grace.

CFD Denying impiety and worldly lusts would seem to precede this positive line of things. Would it show that the principle of self-judgment is to be working in us to make way for what is sober?

RT I think that is what we would feel as we proceed. There is to be displacement. You cannot join the old with the new. Grace does not come in to improve the old man but for displacement. That was so at Corinth; Paul brings in the cross there, cutting at this line of things. So the teaching has an edge to it that displaces these features of self to make room for this new character that is all of grace and makes nothing of us. I think we would see that the working and teaching of grace has substantial effect which will find its display in the world to come.

DMW Do you think that grace has to do with something that is very deep in our spirits. I was wondering if this does not go with what we had in Colossians—If ye then be dead with Christ put to death therefore your members. Is this more the spirit of the flesh here—impiety and worldly lusts?

RT I think so. The law could have made an exterior change. You can get past law by compliance—if you comply with the law, you will get through; but I think grace brings an internal change, a new character and something, as you say, that is deep and formative and soon to be at home in conditions of glory. It is good to keep that before us—as it says, "awaiting the blessed hope". What grace has formed is soon going to shine in different surroundings, and it will be at home in them.

LMcF It speaks of purification—"our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem

us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a peculiar people; zealous for good works". Maybe you could help us as to purification and how it is proceeding presently.

RT As our brother said, it is a deep matter. "Redeem us" means that He takes us out from that condition of things altogether. It is a new man, in Colossians coming into something new. These features are the substantiality of what grace is doing and it should lay hold on us that there is a new character about it. It comes out in these new skins, I think; the old skins would readily burst. The law cannot contain what has come in but the new skins, I think, are formed by grace in these features of "soberly, and justly and piously". It is now individual persons, and, as we see later, it will be contained in a vessel, the assembly. So they are peculiar people, in that others cannot understand why you are living a different character. Someone has said that persons cannot understand a Christian if they cannot understand Christ, because what is coming out is Christ, is it not? He was a rejected Man here, so we understand that these features will never be accommodated in the affairs and circumstances and arrangements of the world. But in the present course of things, grace has come in and it gives the believer power to be formed in those new features. I think the Spirit has a great part in it, as we will see as we proceed in the reading.

HGH It says, "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify to himself a peculiar people", that is, it is His own work. In order for us to be purified we have to have those dealings with Him, do we not?

RT Grace is all His work. Grace appeared and this is how it moved. As we were saying yesterday, it went to the cross, it tasted death, all that was involved in redemption. The appreciation of grace has a great emptying effect on the one hand; it empties of self, because grace makes nothing of self but everything of the Giver and that, I think, lays the basis in the soul for taking on this new character and these features that are formed by grace.

JAP The island of Crete in the Mediterranean where Paul left this brother was a difficult place. He says of them in verse 12 of chapter 1, "Cretans are always liars, evil wild beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true"; this brother had a difficult service. What you said earlier is helpful—the Lord is not going to change things here but I am to be changed, the Christian is to be changed.

RT I think that is the beauty of grace, that whatever the present course of things there is grace to meet it. You see that particularly in Elisha's ministry, the difficulties that arose chapter after chapter; the water was bad, the situation of the city, all these things, but there was always something there to meet them. He did not change the circumstances, but Elisha brings grace upon grace into the circumstances that persons may live piously in the present course of things.

DMW That shows the power of grace, does it not? There is great power in grace, because, in the midst of an adverse scene, the circumstances being really adverse to God, there is a deep work going on in persons. What power there is in grace!

RT Yes. As we were remarking yesterday, the throne of grace is above. The throne is not here, but above principality and authority and every influence that sin has introduced, and from that throne grace is flowing to us in the present course of things, to meet the needs of the moment. I think grace upon grace involves that whatever need arises day after day there is resource to meet it. Maybe we had some apprehension of that yesterday. Well, we are just tested as to how we are making room for it. We cannot join it to the old, otherwise the rent takes place. We can see that all around us; we have known it in our own histories too, but the new wine is in new skins and both are preserved together. There is the teaching of grace in that, as in Romans, teaching self-judgment, as our brother has said, that the old cannot be improved upon. Grace displaces and brings in something that is entirely new to contain the new wine. I think we may link it with Corinth; Paul says to them, "let your heart expand itself", 2 Cor 6: 13. That is a feature of these skins, that they can expand. Grace is not restricted and it does not break, but a feature of grace is that it can expand.

As grace upon grace is coming in in its fulness, these skins can expand and contain the richness and blessedness of what is flowing from the throne above. Corinth was joining the new to the old, they were reigning as kings. It is very affecting, I think, that in the epistle when they are reigning as kings he says, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sakes he, being rich, became poor", 2 Cor 8: 9. Think of these persons reigning in all their pride as men after the flesh, and Paul presents a Man who became poor, He says, "that ye by *his* poverty might be enriched".

KNP You spoke yesterday about the grace that came in the Man from heaven. Is that the type of man that would be represented in these new skins? It is a different order of manhood, is it?

RT Yes. You think of the Lord Jesus when He was here—how pious He was! It says, He was heard because of His piety, Heb 5: 7. Think of Him living soberly and justly. He was in the present course of things, where He was tested, but think of the perfection of sobriety and piety that marked Him. Grace is flowing from Him now as He is crowned above, that something of these features may be marking us in view of the new wine being preserved, and us being preserved in the new system.

JAP Would these allusions you make in Luke, and what the prophet brought in, be to the Holy Spirit?

RT Yes; I think we will see it more definitely as we come to the oil. I think the skins are the Spirit's work. They are certainly not what was there at Corinth—man in his pride—but new skins are, I think, the fruit of the Spirit's grace; so that what has come in in the way of joy and blessing in grace is preserved.

CFD What is your thought about the garment?

RT Do you think we try to patch things? We cannot join grace to man in the flesh or the new to the old. How striking the language is—it will rend it! It does not suit. I think you see the working of that in Corinth and Galatia, the trying to join the old to the new and it brings in bondage, and worse

than that, it says it causes a rent. I think we see in Christendom that the whole thing has become rent, but in the Spirit's grace skins are formed that can expand and contain the glory of what has been introduced in the new system. What would you say?

CFD I think that helps us. The new skins come to light in the preaching of the glad tidings. Persons take on this feature of what is new. They are indwelt by the Spirit—as you say we get that in the oil—but does it not involve complete repentance, so that the change is complete in us. It is not a halfway matter, we are to go all the way, do you think?

RT Yes, I think it works out in the distinguishing of flesh and Spirit; the teaching of Romans comes into it. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit", John 3: 6. You cannot join them. There is the question of displacement, so what comes about is wholly new and fresh in view of things being preserved. I think that is how grace would teach us. As you say, in the gospel it is being born again; there is something that is the pure product of grace, nothing of man in it.

HGH Does the old garment represent the law? The Lord is speaking here to the scribes and the Pharisees. It is really the religious element which comes natural to us if we profess anything. We are really in bondage if we are still under law.

RT Yes; I think it applies to the law. Then it applies too as we think of Corinth and may apply to worldliness. It says, "having denied impiety and worldly lusts",—trying to join what is of grace with the world and with the law, as you said, and these other features, that cannot be joined. What is of grace is grace, not grace attached to law or the world or anything else.

ASH In one of our hymns we have,

"In Christ Jesus"—new creation ...

Old things now have passed away (Hymn 37)

There is no place for the old at this time; it is what is new set on and that is set on in Christ alone. Is that right?

RT Yes, I think this is leading on to that, new creation, old things have passed away. Grace is not a veneer, not an outside coating, but it is wholly new; it is deep, as our brother has said, and it is entirely new in its character. If you put the new wine into old skins what a disaster it is, the whole thing is confusion; it is lost and becomes a misrepresentation. That is what is abroad, Christianity is misrepresented, but the teaching of grace brings in new skins so that the new wine is contained and there is joy—and it says that they are preserved together.

GDR Is not the working of the cross, in all that it involves basic to this? It is the finishing of the first order of man and out of death comes in the second.

RT Yes; I think so. The cross has cut at the root of the thing. Then we need the teaching of grace, and to apply it all the time so that the old does not resurrect itself and we do not try to join up the old with the new. I think grace upon grace is forming these skins and the skins are getting stronger, you may say, and richer, and the wine is pouring in more and more in its fulness as the dispensation is going on. So that as the dispensation increases in fulness, as I think it does, the skins are able to contain what is coming in in the Spirit's grace.

JS I was thinking of your reference to new birth. You get what is wholly new there of God, but it is "born of water and of Spirit", John 3: 5. Do you think the water is the moral element that we have to apply to keep things according to what God has begun in us?

RT Very good. I think that is part of the teaching of grace. The Lord brings that in in John's gospel to Nicodemus, a man who could not understand things. What you say is good—the water brings in the displacement in view of this other character coming in that can contain it. Have you some more to say?

JS We have nothing to do with that initially. It is all of God, but it is wholly new, woven throughout, but we have to maintain it in its purity. Is the water side of things our responsibility to keep things according to what God has begun in us?

RT Yes, I think what we are speaking of today brings in our responsibility. Grace has flowed in its fulness and is still flowing in its fulness, but how is it going to be contained? It requires that we give heed to the teaching, does it not—the teaching as to the water, as you have said, and the teaching of how the vessel would grow. As Paul says to the Corinthians, Let your heart expand itself. So there is the water in its initial features but then there is the Spirit giving growth and the vessels are becoming more pliable and larger so that they can contain the new wine.

EFC Would you tell us what is meant by verse 39 of chapter 5? You have been speaking of the new wine and it is suggestive of the excess of grace and what is to fill the believer, but what about the old wine?

RT Well, what are you going to say about it?

EFC I suppose it is a suggestion of what is Jewish?

RT I think that word "straightway" helps—it says, "no one having drunk old wine straightway wishes for new, for he says, The old is better". I think that is grace coming in that changes our taste. Initially we have a taste for what is old, and we tend to go back to it, but I think grace changes our taste. Have we not tasted that the Lord is good, Peter says, 1 Pet 2: 3? I think Peter is helping these babes to change their taste so that they may appreciate what is new and may desire to have skins that expand more. Paul was trying to get Corinth to do that, that the fulness of grace might be their present portion.

EFC Would that be the superiority of Christianity over the old? We are apt to try to resurrect something of the old.

RT It is not straightway; we do not come into it immediately. But have we not tasted that the Lord is good? There is grace coming in and so we begin to prefer grace, we begin to prefer what has come in in Christ—as you said, the superiority of Christianity. So we do not go back to law. That was Galatia. It is striking the word Paul uses, "ye have fallen from grace", Gal 5: 4. What happened was that sonship was lost and bondage was the result—"fallen from grace". I think

the change would be grace coming in to help us to prefer it, always.

PEM Paul was counting on Timothy to continue after he had gone, so he says to him, "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus", 2 Tim 2: 1.

RT That is very beautiful. It is a chapter that requires separation, yet that is how he begins it, "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus". So separation is not an arbitrary matter. Mr Darby wrote that pamphlet on separation and he wrote another one after it; he said he felt the need of it, Grace was the ground of gathering and the power of unity. "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus". You can apply separation, but separation is not a ground of gathering exactly, nor is it the power for unity; it is grace that forms these skins that can hold the wine. You may be separate and become a monk and isolated, and it becomes law really, but I think grace comes in to form these skins that can contain the wine and both are preserved together.

EFC Would you say the motive for separation is attraction to Christ? We sometimes feel we have to drive ourselves away from something that is not pleasing to God, but the point is that if we are attracted to Christ, we just automatically leave it, so to speak.

RT It is because we cannot have Him in mixed conditions, so we need to separate from the conditions in view of enjoying Christ. But then, as we said, the great point is being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; it holds us together, and it is the great centre and gathering point. That is by the way as it were, but it brings in this grace, the power of it, to form skins in which the wine can be contained.

JAP Does it not say in Hebrews of the Lord Jesus that He was separated from sinners, Heb 7: 26? It is one of the things said about Him, but in the gospels He was approachable. So both things are true. Is that right—we walk in separation but we should be approachable? He was accused of eating with sinners too, and yet He was separated from them. How do you work all that out?

RT Well, Mr Bellett in that beautiful book, *The Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ*, makes this comment as to the pathway of Jesus; His holiness set Him apart from all, in His holiness He was separate from every man, but His grace made Him the servant of all. I think you see these things worked out beautifully there; holiness necessitates separation but in grace He was a servant of all.

GDR Peter says in John 6 in answer to the Lord's probing, "Thou hast words of life eternal", v 68. I wondered if grace is not contained in His words in a current sense for us. That wonderful supply is coming through His words, is it not?

RT Yes; I think so. It is the teaching of grace. We were speaking of how it appeared but I think the teaching of grace goes through the dispensation. So as the increase of wine is coming in, there are the skins to contain it. You can see the skins expanding in the beginning of the Acts, can you not? People thought they were full of new wine, but what they were full of was the Spirit and there were new skins to contain what was coming in in its fulness.

KNP It is interesting that it is plural. It is not 'a new skin' but "skins". I was thinking of what you were saying about the beginning of the Acts, because Peter stood up with the eleven at that point, did he not?

RT Very good. There was support and no jealousy, no rivalry. I am sure the apostles got on better together as they came into the gain of Christianity in the Acts than they had done before. Peter and John went up together; they were two new skins. He said, Not silver and gold, but such as I have give I to thee, Acts 3: 6. You see the power there of the new skins and the new wine, reaching out to the man with their hands and bringing him into the joy and blessedness of what they were the exponents of.

DMW Do you think it was grace that strengthened his ankle bones?

RT Very good.

DMW He did not want to let go of them, he wanted to join up with them. We see grace effective in moving that man and strengthening him so that he could praise God.

RT I think that is good. He took on the teaching of grace, you may say, as he laid hold of Peter and John, and immediately his ankle bones were strengthened. You see there the new skin; he was leaping, walking and praising God, the new wine in the new skin. The old was left behind entirely and he would not go back to it. The danger with us, as we said about Galatia, is going back; so the need of being preserved in the newness and freshness, and the elasticity to expand, as the fulness of what is in the dispensation comes into our hearts.

LDP I was wondering about Paul and Silas in relation to the jailor; if there is evidence there of the grace we are speaking of: "Do thyself no harm", Acts 16: 28.

RT Very good. And how richly the jailor took it on, did he not? How richly he laid the table for them, as he took on the teaching of grace very quickly. I think Paul and Silas are fine examples of the new skins; men shut up in the prison wrongfully and chained beyond what was necessary, but there you see the new skins and the new wine. Had it been old skins they would have been rebellious, and they would have been irked and irritated and depressed, but I think there you see the new wine and the new skins. In the prison they were praising God with singing.

JS Seeing that they were with Jesus, see Acts 4: 13. They had taken on that character of man, do you think?

RT New skins. It is the effect of grace, and so there was new wine, there was blessing available and joy for others in the new skins. It is not just a preaching or a sermon, but it is the preacher and the preaching. The preacher augments the words. It is not a novice exactly, but the thing is augmented as was said earlier. Peter stood up with the eleven; there was something augmenting the preaching, the wine and the new skins. So there is not inconsistency. The gospel goes out from

a realm of wealth and with the preacher there is the new skin and the new wine.

CFD Do you think that comes out in the apostles in the early part of the Acts? Persons looked upon them and they recognised them that they had been with Jesus. There was something shining out testimonially that marked them as being different, that was that they knew the presence of Christ.

RT I think they became like that because they preferred the new. They did not straightway prefer it. I think they had come to see that the new was better and they left Judaism, they left the other things that would have held them. In the man in John 9, you see the new wine and the new skin very beautifully, and these persons you have been speaking about begin to see the attractiveness of what has come in in grace upon grace in Christ, and there you begin to prefer it. So it says, No one straightway wishes for new. I think we become attracted, become charmed by the Man in whom grace has shone out, and we begin to follow Him. The persons that you speak of became followers, they preferred the new and they kept their eye on the source of that grace.

LMcF Thinking of the assembly at Thessalonica—the short period of time Paul preached there—what came to light was these new skins. They turned to God from idols and to await His Son from the heavens, 1 Thess 1: 9.

RT That is very beautiful. So that there is a testimony in the new wine and the new skins that they are waiting for His Son. I think that links on with what we are speaking of, that we are awaiting the appearing of our great God and Saviour. So in the waiting time there is something that will be ready for the appearing, there is the new wine that will be at home in those new surroundings.

SEMacC Hannah provided a new coat every year for her son. I was wondering, in the way of expanding things, what can we do to provide new skin conditions for our brother, for one another, so that the new wine can be seen?

RT You start with yourself, I suppose. There is nothing more affecting than the display of the thing. As the new wine

is displayed in the new skin, as, we might say, in Jesus, it becomes attractive and persons begin to follow. To help others we have to display in ourselves that we are marked by new features; having denied impiety and worldly lusts, we are living soberly, justly and piously. These are the new skin features, that there is what is compatible with the new wine and both are preserved. We want that in our localities, we want it in ourselves, but we want it in our localities that things are preserved. They were not being preserved at Corinth—things were held very loosely, the skins were not able to contain what was there. But we want to make room for the teaching of grace so that things are preserved in our localities in the joy that is suited to the grace of the dispensation.

KAK I was thinking of the new skin. It is really linked with the recent death of an animal, is it not?

RT Yes. Go on.

KAK The fact that death was recent would help us in the understanding of grace, would it not?

RT I think that helps us, so we do not go back. If we get away, as you say, from the death of Christ, pride comes in and man comes in and we resort then to law. It brings in bondage and bondage cannot hold the new wine. Indeed the new wine, sonship, was being suppressed in Galatia, it was not functioning because, as you say, we get away from the death of Christ, which makes way for the new.

KAK So the effectiveness of the preaching on the part of Peter and later of Paul was that they recognised the recency of the death of Christ for them personally.

RT It is always current, is it not? As we have in our scripture in Titus, "who gave himself". We think of that each week at the Supper. The Supper, I think, would help in these new skins, that we remember the death of the Lord. He died here, so how can we live in worldly things if the world has crucified my Lord. Mary was kept to it too, and you see the beauty of a new skin and new wine, as we were reading yesterday, in her. "Go to my brethren", there is the new wine pouring in and you see the new skins there able to contain it.

JAP It is the first clothing in scripture, is it not? God clothed Adam and Eve in skins, see Gen 3: 21.

RT The thing is that they do not become old, as I said, they retain their elasticity. The law and what was legal which was coming into Galatia, makes things very brittle, and things come up among us like that, and we get very brittle and things crack. I think grace brings in patience; the wine and the skins are preserved together. There is a great need for that, I think, that grace can expand as Paul was exhorting the Corinthians, Let your heart expand itself.

HJG That would help us to appreciate the epistles; as was mentioned yesterday, they begin with grace to you and end with it. It would help us to consider that as we take in the epistles.

RT It is very interesting that grace is hardly spoken about in the gospels. It is not mentioned in Matthew, nor Mark, it is mentioned I think twice in Luke and may be twice or three times in John, and it is mentioned in all the epistles, showing the teaching of grace. There was a display of it in the gospels but the epistles bring in the need for being taught, that grace might be formative in us that we come out in the character of the Man in whom grace has been displayed in its fulness. So the importance, as we have said, of the teaching. That comes into this "straightway". We do not straightway wish for new but grace helps to change our taste and the teaching becomes formative so that there is a vessel compatible with the wine. The woman in Kings may connect very strikingly, I thought, with Galatians; she had known better times. She was a woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets, although they do not shine very well in the book, but she is there widowed and is coming into debt. Very sad that the believer, or, as in Galatia, the local company, should come into debt, come into bondage when all the time there is what can meet the whole position. It is a very striking feature of Elisha's ministry that he asks, What have you here? He does not bring in something from heaven exactly but He says, What is here? We have been furnished in the Spirit with something that will last through the whole dispensation, and what Elisha brings up time after

time is, What use are you making of what you have been furnished with? The commodities he uses are very simple, salt, oil, meal, wood, all things that were there, all that had been provided in grace. So we have been furnished with enough to meet whatever circumstances may arise if we make use and avail ourselves of what grace has provided.

ASH It would be very encouraging to our hearts to make use of what we have. The woman said she had nothing but a pot of oil. In her eyes that was nothing, but the prophet makes much of it and we are to make much of what we have in that same realm. I thought too of the scripture in John 6: 9, "There is a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two small fishes". One could say, What is that among so many? Does that fit in?

RT It fed five thousand, and they went away satisfied, and more than that, they had some over. I think it is good what you bring in, that there was something there. We all have something, how are we appreciating it? He has given us richly of His Spirit. That is what Paul is bringing into Galatia, that there is a power there to maintain sonship. The woman was saying that the children were there and the creditors were there, and she was going to eat and die. Things have broken down, things are so small, but he says, What have you in the house? And she found she had enough to restore the privileges and joys of sonship and to be maintained for the rest of the time—live on the rest.

JS Is it true to say then that the Lord has fitted every local assembly with sufficient to see it through to the end?

RT Yes. I think in this setting it has been done in the gift of the Spirit. I think it is part of the fulness of grace that the Spirit has come from the ascended Christ. Because it says, What have you in the house? Elisha does not say that I will have to go away and get something else and bring it in, but it is what has come into the dispensation in the gift of the Spirit.

JS In applying it to the local assemblies, you get the thought of the house in the beginning of Acts. The enemy has been against the formation and expression of the local

assembly. Do you think the value of what God has placed there gives everything necessary to its maintenance until the Lord comes?

RT It is to function in sonship. Paul brings that so beautifully into Galatia "Ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus", Gal 3: 26. Then he says He has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father, Gal 4: 6. Paul would have Galatia to be functioning like Ephesus, would he not, as appreciating what is there in the Spirit?

CFD So if there is the evidence of not employing what is available to us and our localities are reduced—and in some parts some localities because of conditions are having to cease—it is not because of the lack of divine supply. There must be some lack, may be on our side, in the appropriation of it, do you think?

RT Well, there is what has come in governmentally that we bow to. There are certain things in God's hand as to how things may be declining publicly, but I think there is also the sense here that vitality is to be maintained. The woman said that there had been better days but she was in widowhood. She says, Thy servant feared God and now the creditor has come. Now, who is going to get the upper hand, the creditor or the Spirit? There is a way to it; she shuts the door. She says, What shall I do? She acknowledges her position, she states it as she sees, but Elisha does not accept her estimate about it. He maintains the sense that there is fulness to meet things, so he tells her how to do it. Shutting the door would shut out these features of doubts that may arise with us and the fear.

KAK How do you understand the borrowing of vessels?

RT Well, if you have reached this kind of state you may need to call on your neighbours to help you. He says, "Go, borrow for thyself". We should not need to, but she had lost something, she had been careless. I think that comes into Corinth and into Galatia; they had been careless about things; and we do not have what we should have had. She did not have them, she had not appreciated what had been given her

earlier on; she had been careless and lost something. So he says to go and borrow vessels, empty vessels. It should not be necessary but we may need help from others to restore our faith and restore and encourage our hearts as to the blessedness and fulness of what there is there. What would you think about it?

KAK I was wondering if it might be linked with the gospel—empty vessels?

RT He says, Go borrow abroad from all thy neighbours. We are thankful for neighbours in these days. Opposite to this, the ship was becoming overloaded and they called to their partners (Luke 5: 7); there were neighbours there to contain the fulness of things. Here in times of reduction we are helped through our neighbours. But I think she is helped eventually to stand on her own feet and to make use of all that is in the place that has come in in the oil. She had the oil but she needed her apprehension of it to be enlarged; our neighbours sometimes help us about these things.

GDR Preservation of life in these two children is an important matter. That would also be in Elisha's mind, the preservation of what was potential in the locality. How vital that is! In another setting it says the situation of the city is good but the water is bad, 1 Kings 2: 19.

RT Here, as to the children, she was writing them down, was she not? When we begin to get discouraged we write down the brethren. We say, We have only so-and-so, very few and they are not much, and we begin to discredit things. But Elisha maintains the idea of sonship. That is what Paul was striving at in Galatia. They were acting as children, they had fallen from grace and they began to get accustomed to things at a lower level, whereas Elisha here is bringing in, as Paul did, that in the Spirit there is grace and power to maintain things at their true level, whatever the outward circumstances in the dispensation.

LMcF What is to be learned from the oil being in a pot, in a vessel—a pot of oil?

RT I think it is locatable. She could locate it, it is not held loosely; I think the Spirit is identifiable. What would you say?

LMcF I thought of the local assembly, the idea of a vessel.

RT She says first of all that she has not anything at all in the house. There is nothing here, nothing in the meeting. If we speak like that there will be nothing. But who can identify not only the pot of oil but the potentiality. That is what Elisha is bringing out, the potentiality that was in the place in the pot of oil and in the sons.

JAP It would seem that the places you mentioned twice in the first reading and this reading, whom Paul had to warn about faith, were helped—particularly Corinth, they answered. Perhaps in Galatia there was an answer too. Peter had responded to Paul's adjustment. And in Hebrews our brother Timothy was set at liberty, Heb 13: 23. It would seem that something worked to answer Paul's concern. Is that saying too much?

RT No, I think grace is working. Paul would alert the saints as to the fulness of what there is in grace. That is what Elisha is doing here. So he told her to borrow these vessels and says, Do not let it be few. She was a bit restricted and we get restricted; but the Spirit is not limited, He is not restricted, He has come from the glorified Christ. We spoke yesterday of the Lord bringing in the wealth of heaven with Him but so is the Spirit; He is bringing in the wealth of the glorified Man. So he says, Do not let it be few. And then he says, "Shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons". Shut out these influences of doubt that would discredit things. And there she is shut in, herself and her sons and the oil, and what a potential!

PEM "And set aside what is full", Elisha says. Would she now have a store to draw upon, and do we have a store to draw upon?

RT The first thing is that she meets debt. The liabilities are all met in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit helps us to meet that side of things in view of living on the rest. The Spirit's normal service is to bring us into the liberty of sonship; but He helps us to meet the debt.

EFC So we have no excuse for spiritual impoverishment with the Holy Spirit available to us in our localities if we make room for Him, as well as in our personal lives. If we sow to the flesh we reap from the flesh nothing but impoverishment, would you say?

RT I think that is good. So he is encouraging this woman to sow to the Spirit. The oil takes on a new meaning and character in her eyes, does it not? 'Nothing at all but a pot of oil', but she comes to see that it not only meets the debt but she is able to live in the joy of the glory of Christianity.

LDP Nehemiah would be an encouragement to us. He was one person who had an exercise and he was able to get the benefit of help that was available through others. I am thinking of his involving the high priest—he arose and his brethren. This is the element that was used to rebuild the wall and make things suitable for Jehovah.

RT I think Nehemiah was someone who appreciated things. He said, Our God will help us. If the Jews and these other ones were against him, he says God will help us. God helped them in the building Nehemiah speaks about. I think he is more or less the opposite to the widow, or is like the widow after she has these vessels filled and the debts paid, and like Nehemiah she is able to live in the triumph of God being for us.

GDP That is one of the things that Paul introduced in Galatia—"to reveal his Son in me", Gal 1: 16. Is that not sonship?

RT Very good. Say some more about that.

GDP I was thinking of how he himself had experienced the pouring out. He said, I am a pharisee of pharisees but he counted that all loss; did he not, pouring out the old?

RT Yes, I think so. I think Paul was trying to get them to shut the door at Galatia to appreciate what was there in the Spirit's grace, that "ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus", Gal 3: 26. Think of the door being shut and the oil being appreciated, "Ye are all God's sons". And then he says,

He sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father, Gal 4: 6. There is living on the rest. The woman comes to appreciate that the debt is met never to rise again, and she is living now in circumstances that are superior to all the bondage that had been there previously. What a joy this woman must have had that she could live on the rest.

HJG Would you say it is good to get the gain of the prophetic word, that is what we believe we are having these days. This is the prophet's word. He says, "pour out into all those vessels". She did not stop until they were all filled. She had taken on the prophet's word, had she not?

RT That is encouraging for us. So the prophetic word is there to help us to appreciate what is there. As we said earlier, the prophet does not in this instance bring in something from a far country but he helps her to appreciate the divine furnishings that are there. And it says the oil stayed, there was not a vessel more and the oil stayed. It is still available for the next time, grace upon grace, whatever may come in. So the next time things come up she would know where to turn to, the oil is still there. So we learn where the resource is and how to make room for it, the oil stayed.

ASH What is to be learned from the fourth verse, "and go in, and shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons"? What do we gain from that, closing the door?

RT I think it shuts out these elements of doubt. They said, We have nothing here, as you quoted earlier, but five loaves and two small fishes. These are the doubts, the door is open to doubts, but I think as you shut the door you shut that out and what she has inside the door is the oil and the vessels and her sons. So that, as you said, in that instance what they came to see was that things were in the hand of Christ. You shut out the feelings of inferiority that you may have, to appreciate the fulness of what grace has furnished us with.

KNP Would the realisation of what was there in the pot of oil bring out what was there in the sons too, because it says, "they brought the vessels to her, and she poured out". There seems to be an appreciation of those that she maybe had not

appreciated properly before, speaking disparagingly about them perhaps, but there is a great appreciation of them, "Bring me yet a vessel".

RT I think that is one great feature of the Spirit's service, to elevate the brethren in our minds and our thoughts, that we clothe them with sonship. As we said earlier in the meetings, Paul said grace to Corinth as well as saying grace to Ephesus. He would elevate the saints and their potential; if their state may be Corinthian think of the potential that was there! And she here through this experience sees them at their full potential, the sons living on the power that has been given in all the dignity and the wealth that belongs to sonship.

GDR You quoted that exhortation of Paul to Corinth, "let your heart also expand itself". Do you think we need to be strengthened perhaps in faith? Our brother has mentioned the smallness of a number of places and that is pretty general in this country, but faith would lay hold of what is available, what the Lord is able for in the workings of divine grace?

RT Yes. I think faith and grace that we have been speaking of go together. I trust we have been helped to see in these meetings that there is power in faith and there is power in grace. You see it, as was remarked, in Stephen, the power that was there in grace. And the power that is here in the Spirit to maintain things at their full level in spite of the surroundings. The husband is dead, you cannot bring him back, things are there but the creditor is kept out in the power that has been given us in the gift of the Spirit.

NEW YORK

4th November 1995

List of initials at the end of the fifth reading

GRACE—IV

2 Samuel 9: 11-13; 19: 24 & 30
1 Samuel 25: 18, 27-31

RT I thought we might be helped to see in these two persons of whom we have read how grace formed in them features that shine in declining circumstances. The background to Mephibosheth is well known. When David came to the throne he asked if there was any to whom he could show kindness. We see in Mephibosheth how he was well received, and the formative work of grace in him expressed itself in loyalty in a day of departure—something that is called for today. Though the public position meant that David was set aside, he remained king to Mephibosheth: he did not change his attitude though everybody else did. It shows how grace had formed him; he remained loyal. One of the features of which we read in Titus was awaiting the appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us. I think Mephibosheth had a real sense of what grace had done and he was awaiting, not adjusting himself to the circumstances around. He says, My lord the king—rejected king publicly but he was the king to Mephibosheth. We see something of the same features in Abigail. When things have declined, she maintains the ground, because she had in her heart some sense of the light of purpose. The purpose of God for David did not change, and she had some light of a coming day when the purposes of God would be effectuated. It did not look like it that day, but she embraced those purposes, and she shines in the grace that would be nourished as feeding on the purposes of God, that everything centres in Christ. Do you have something to say about Mephibosheth?

JS I think you have just set out one's thought about it, that he was one who not only had a tremendous appreciation of David's person, but I thought he required nothing more than this place at the king's table; in a sense morally he never left it. So anything else was superfluous.

RT Yes, he came into royalty, and that expressed itself in loyalty. Two features, he enjoyed were royalty and sonship;

David said, Mephibosheth shall eat bread at my table continually. He enjoyed his royal position. That is like the Supper—privilege. We were speaking about privilege yesterday. He enjoyed his privilege and when he is tested he shines in loyalty. It is a very fine thing in our time, that grace has produced persons who are loyal when there is opportunity to take advantage of the situation. That has happened too: things come in and persons take opportunity to promote themselves. But Mephibosheth remained loyal, awaiting the return of the king.

JAP Did Peter's committal in communion with the Lord stand among the recovered brethren to whom you referred, John 21? In his earlier committals, he meant well. That is like us; the Lord has to bring us through to something in our committal. Mephibosheth did that.

RT He came to appreciate not only the grace but the source of the grace. We spoke of that yesterday, that we come not only to know the grace of God but to know the God of grace. That is what Mephibosheth came to: applying it to us, it is all centred in Christ. If all around deny Him, the depth of that appreciation remains and Mephibosheth is showing forth His death, you may say, until He come. It is very fine how far grace takes us; it says he dwelt in Jerusalem and did eat continually at the king's table; no mixed tables with him, the distinctiveness of the royal position laid hold of him and everything was measured by the king's table and the food on the king's table.

EFC He seemed to appreciate, as you said earlier, the grace of David showing the kindness of God to him. Mephibosheth received it readily and rightly, and feelingly too.

RT A dead dog, that is what he says, "That thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?", 2 Sam 9: 8. Have we touched that depth? There was nothing in us when grace met us—a dead dog such as I. If anybody warranted the vindictiveness of David, you may say, it was the house of Saul. But grace went that far, 'to look upon such a dead dog as I am'. Grace did not stop until he was dwelling in Jerusalem and eating at the king's table.

PEM David said "as one of the king's sons"—nothing less than that.

RT Yes. Sonship does not have grades. "Ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus", Gal 3: 26. Everyone resembles Christ; there is no disparity. It is wonderful to lay hold of that, that there are no grades in sonship.

EFC The Syrophenician woman came into this too like Mephibosheth; she said, Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table, Mark 7: 28. She took a very lowly position. The Lord did not ask any more confession, the whole matter was settled for the Lord in what she said.

RT That is very good. There is a need to have a state that allows grace to operate. I think that comes out in what you say, that we appreciate how far off we were. Like the Samaritan and the man that fell among robbers: he went from that to the inn. He was in a half-dead state and grace met him. We need to allow grace to have its perfect work, not interfered with through law or the Galatian error or anything else, but grace in its purity to form something of these features, as we eat continually at the king's table.

EFC From degradation to glory. Each member of the church too would appreciate that, would they not?

RT I think so. That is how far grace takes us: it does not stop. The king did not stop with Mephibosheth in a half-way house in the environs of Jerusalem, but he brought him right in to eat at the king's table continually. You could not deflect Mephibosheth with Egypt's food or what the world may offer; he measured everything by what was at the king's table. That is a guide for us as to things that come in to deflect us, in the lowering of standards that is abroad today. Things were measured in Mephibosheth's eye by what was set on at the king's table. He did not prepare it; it was all prepared. It was what was suited to the king's taste and that was what satisfied Mephibosheth.

LDP Was Mephibosheth's loyalty tested by Ziba's slandering? All the time that the king was away from Jerusalem was in itself a challenge to him as to how to

maintain himself, but now what Ziba has done. The enemy would be viciously seeking to cause us to fall from grace. But he was not successful—"let him take all".

RT The secret is that he was well nourished. We quoted Naphtali yesterday in Moses' blessing—"satisfied with favour. And full of the blessing", Deut 33: 23. He was satisfied. So, as you say, the features of Ziba come in to ridicule the saints as to why they trouble themselves, why they remain loyal when things seem broken, when there seems no hope, why remain loyal? It was Mephibosheth's appreciation of David and of his grace and of that food with which he was satisfied that helped him to remain loyal amid all the rebuffs of Ziba, as you have said.

DMW Does Mica make room for us? It seems that provision in grace is made all the way to the end, even for the coming generation to enter in and eat at the king's table. What do you think?

RT I think Mica would grow in the grace that he would see displayed in Mephibosheth. So that it would extend into the family. What a change they would see in Mephibosheth from Lodebar, the place of no pasture—struggling to get by, you may say. The family would be affected by the grace that was finding expression in Mephibosheth. Have you more to say?

DMW We have the coming generation here. Mephibosheth had to pass through it all, you might say, but room is made all the way to the end.

RT So, as you say, the coming generation is to be affected by what they see in those who have been formed in grace and that helps them to have a taste for this food at the king's table that they may be formed by it. As Paul was passing on to Timothy, they were to pass on to faithful men what they were satisfied with, and enjoying themselves, to hand it on in integrity and in its fulness. We do not pass on the sorrows of the breakdown exactly but the full features of what has come to us in grace.

DMW I think that is wonderful to see and to lay hold of. Thinking back to the previous reading, what was on the inside

after the doors were shut was very precious; there was room made for real expansion. To get our eyes on the breakdown and to be occupied with that can be ruinous, as can even trying to bring in something from outside. What is on the inside is extremely precious and it is being held for the coming generation; whatever generation is here when the Lord comes it is going to be held.

RT What you are bringing up is important, that we are to live in the light of the coming of the Lord. We are not awaiting further breakdown, we are awaiting His appearing. That in type is what Mephibosheth was awaiting. You could see in the family day by day that he would be passing on to the coming generation that he was awaiting the coming of the king. That is what we are waiting for. The hymn says—

The sky, not the grave, is our goal (Hymn 238)

There is something of that being passed on, but it is only passed on from satisfied hearts, is it not?

DMW Would you call that the influence of grace? Younger ones coming on are to see the influence that grace has had on persons who have passed through deep waters, but they have kept their eye on the Lord. They have known what grace was, they have known the resources and God has brought them through. The same can be true for each of us.

RT Yes. We are to grow in it, and the warning in Hebrews is, See that there is not any one that lacks it, Heb 12: 15. If there is a lack of it, a root of bitterness springs up, and it says many get defiled by it. These things have been true, but the positive side is that he is living in Jerusalem, in the centre of God's thoughts and His purposes, the city of the great king; he is living in relation to that and eating at the king's table continually. If you offer Mephibosheth another meal and another company, he would not go. He measures everything by Jerusalem and the king's table.

JS Peter speaks about being begotten again. He says, "according to his great mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead", 1 Pet 1: 3. Would that come into it? He had forfeited

every right on the natural side but everything is restored in "from among the dead, to an incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance". Would that be the living hope that Mephibosheth had?

RT That connects with what was said. What Peter was passing on to those dispersed people was "an incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance, reserved in the heavens for you", v 4. It is fine to be able to pass that on. How was Peter able to do that? I think he had Jerusalem and the king's table in his heart. He saw the mount of transfiguration. He was perhaps looking on others at that time but enshrined now in his heart was, "This is my beloved Son".

JAP Do you have more to say about the Lord's supper in this matter?

RT I think it is an expression of our loyalty. That is what remains through the dispensation. 'This do for a calling of me to mind'. I think most in Jerusalem in Mephibosheth's time were against David but Mephibosheth in his manners and the way he was acting was awaiting David's return. So that as we are waiting the Lord's coming, the Supper is an expression of loyalty to the rejected one.

LDP Is Mephibosheth not also an example of a person who is greatly restricted? He cannot get around but that allows him to become a trophy of grace.

RT He had restrictions, as you say, and we have them too, but grace rises above them. Our brother spoke about government and grace last night: these two lines go together, but as has often been said, he was not seen to be lame when he was at the king's table. Grace comes in to help us. So you may think Mephibosheth was disadvantaged but I do not think he would say that; he would say the compensation is far greater than the limitations—the king's table.

CFD Speaking about Peter again, in John 6, after that chapter of glory, it says, "many of his disciples went away back and walked no more with him", v 66. So the Lord tested Peter, would he go away? And he says to Him, "To whom shall we go? thou hast words of life eternal; and we have believed and

known that thou art the holy one of God". Does it show what Peter had been feeding on, what he had been getting into his soul, so that at a critical moment he can give an excellent lead to those that are nearby?

RT Yes. I think the shining out of grace leads us to its source, and as you say, Peter came to see the source and there was no-one else, "To whom shall we go?" He is in effect saying, Thou alone hast words of eternal life, it is nowhere else. That is what Mephibosheth comes to appreciate, that the one who is the source of that grace, the person, is precious to his heart. The circumstances were declining and yet he always speaks about David as the king; he never changes his thoughts about him. Whatever the darkness of the day and the pressures of the way it says, "from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace", then he says, "my lord the king is come again". To put it in our language, royalty and glory and majesty belong to Christ. Rejected He may be, but all glory belongs to Him, and that is what the heart is led to as attached to this Person.

JS Peter speaks about a holy priesthood and a royal priesthood, 1 Pet 2: 5 & 9. Do you think these two things are seen with Mephibosheth?

RT You had better explain that.

JS He had known the blessedness of the inside position and came out in features of royalty, do you think?

RT That is very fine. You may have said Mephibosheth was not very royal-looking here, but he is loyal in the reproach; it says if ye suffer in the name of Christ, the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you, 1 Pet 4: 14. What you say is good: he tasted royalty at the king's table, so he does not change his attitude as circumstances around change.

JAP About nine times in those few verses in chapter 19 he speaks of the king.

RT Christendom is changing its views about Christ and the world is getting full of alternative religions. All these things are around us and the very name that was held and esteemed

generally in Christian countries has become maligned. The sadness and sorrow of that should affect us. But to Mephibosheth, David remains the royal personage; he is ever the same. For Mephibosheth, he is still the king; there is no rival to David in his affections.

HJG The Spirit of God says in verse 24, "from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace", and in verse 30 Mephibosheth uses the words, "since my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house". Would you say something about why peace is brought in?

RT How did he come again in peace to his own house? Someone kept it. Who is keeping the house today? Christendom is not keeping it, standards have gone; you may say, the true features of Christianity have been lost publicly in what is said about the Lord, and His work, and His birth. Who is keeping the house? It is Mephibosheth, is it not? So he comes in peace. Does not the Lord say, when He comes will He indeed find faith on the earth, Luke 18: 8? I think He finds it in persons who have appreciated grace and who have come under the teaching of grace, so that He can come again to his own house.

DMW So loyalty has its reward. We are in restful conditions here and enjoying the peace that we are reading about, and looking forward to tomorrow that we might raise that standard to a rejected Christ, put our hand to the loaf in unity and hold to it.

RT So there is a place to which He can come, the Lord's table. There is loyalty to the Lord's table and there is a place where He can come. He comes in peace, as we were reading in John 20, and brings in peace. But there is someone maintaining His rights in these declining circumstances in view of His coming in. It is maintained as accepting the reproach. He had neither washed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes: that means that he became disreputable in the public eye as he accepted the reproach of the Christ.

EFC Do you think he suffered more from the way David acted towards him here at the last? David seemed to misunderstand him; he accepted a wrong report about him. That must have affected Mephibosheth but it did not disturb him; he just stood his ground, in allegiance to the king.

RT Yes. I did not read these verses but it does just show that we may be misunderstood. David is not a type of Christ in that regard. Being misunderstood even by others who should know better does not affect Mephibosheth because the true David is enshrined in his affections. Whatever the circumstances may become it does not affect him because he measures everything by Jerusalem and the king's table and the king's food. So we need standards. I think Mephibosheth was maintaining the standard. He could have shaved, he could have trimmed his beard. People say it will not matter much if you lower things just a bit, a wider fellowship, but Mephibosheth says, No, that is not in accord with the king that I know.

LMcF So he is esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect to the recompense. That is said of Moses, Heb 12: 26. There is a reward as our brother has been saying.

RT It may have seemed long in coming publicly, but on the first day of the week is there not a reward as He comes in; the King? "Arise, anoint him; for this is he", 1 Sam 16: 12.

GDR You would say, would you not, that the only way in which the testimony is going to be maintained is loyalty to Christ? We would all say Amen to that. But then the test comes; we have here a beautiful example of it. Everyone together would be ready to say, Yes, we desire that the testimony be maintained, but this is the only basis for it.

RT The background to it is the teaching and the enjoyment of grace, is it not? His soul was thoroughly nourished and satisfied in the grace that had brought him from a dead dog to the king's table. Do we appreciate where grace has placed us in the light of the assembly? It has placed us in Jerusalem. Grace has placed us in a place of great privilege. Now that

privilege is maintained only as we are loyal in the declining circumstances that are all around us. As our brother says, we would all say it is right, and would seek grace and help that it may lay hold of us, that we do not trim our sails to the circumstances around or adjust our habits, but maintain what suits the king. He is still the same in Mephibosheth's eye though the public deride him. Although they say, We will not have this Man to reign over us, He is still the King in Mephibosheth's heart.

JMcI He was one who had real appreciation for the king. Barzillai could say, I will go a little way over the Jordan. That is not the standard, is it?

RT No. He had done well: it is the present that is the test.

EFC Is it our regard for the assembly and what is proper to it as we meet together in the light of it that proves our allegiance to Christ? That is a challenge to us in these days of smallness and brokenness, is it not? The Lord is very jealous of His assembly.

RT Mephibosheth stayed in Jerusalem. Many others went away, as our brother says, in John 6. Will ye also go away? Mephibosheth could have found another place, but he stayed in Jerusalem. That would mean that he stayed in the light of the assembly. In a broken day he embraced the light that he had enjoyed in Jerusalem at the king's table: it remained in its preciousness in spite of the broken time and he was holding on to that until the king came again in peace to his own house.

DMW We can be assured of the Lord maintaining us there, but not anywhere else, can we? David would tell Barzillai that he would maintain him.

RT That is a very fine word he gives to Barzillai, "I will maintain thee with me in Jerusalem". The offer was there for Barzillai—Mephibosheth laid hold of it with both hands, to be with him in Jerusalem. Barzillai felt his weakness and David is very sympathetic with him, but Mephibosheth laid hold of the great privilege and he would settle for nothing less.

PEM Where is the king's own house today?

RT Have you never been in it? "Since my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house". I think it is where the King is free, where He is seen, and is known. He is not known publicly, but I think He is known in His own house. I think it would come down to the local assembly where the King is free to speak of these royal things.

PEM Would it involve, too, His rightful place in the hearts of His own?

RT That is what makes the house. It says, Whose house are we, if indeed we hold fast the confession firm to the end, Heb 3: 6. That was what Mephibosheth was doing, he was holding fast the confession firm to the end. So it is, Whose house are we. He comes in peace to his own house. He does not have to adjust things when he comes. Someone has kept it ready, has seen that there is a place for Him to be at rest, in peace. And that is where His heart is known and where His love is enjoyed.

GDR While we await that glorious time there is activity needed. The end of Proverbs shows a woman of much activity, night and day; there are things in loyalty to him that need to be done.

RT Very good. And as our brother has said, she was looking after the coming generation. She set on food and clothing, all in keeping with the time. She would not be going in for casual things—no fast food with her! She was there keeping the house in view of the husband's return. She rose early, she was diligent to see that all was ready for his return. That is what is in our hands now as to keeping the place in view of His return. It is the effect of the teaching of grace that has formed us in a character that is steadfast and immovable as it says (1 Cor 15: 58), all maintaining the standard of what is suitable to Him.

KNP Is there a link with faith and grace? There does not seem to be any doubt in Mephibosheth's mind that David would come back. Is it grace that works that out having experienced it?

RT Yes. He must reign. I think that brings us to Abigail. She had some sense of what belonged to David in his true greatness. In type, she laid hold of God's thoughts about Christ. That is what Mephibosheth comes to enjoy, that God had anointed David. Did He make a mistake? Was God going to change His mind? We had a word on anointing last night, God had anointed David, and Mephibosheth knew something of that, and irrespective of what may have come in or how things may have been publicly, he was waiting the fulness of the anointing. God has anointed His king upon Zion, His holy hill, (Ps 2: 6) and Mephibosheth was awaiting the public display of that. And so with Abigail. I was struck with her words, "when Jehovah shall do to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning thee, and shall appoint thee ruler over Israel". She did not take her bearings from the public circumstances but she believed what God had said about David. She learned from Samuel I suppose, and though she did not see it publicly at the moment, she embraced in her heart God's purposes concerning Christ.

EFC There are two women in this book of 1 Samuel who seem to look on to David. Hannah in her prayer in chapter 2 says, "Jehovah will judge the ends of the earth; and he will give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed", 1 Sam 2: 10. I was thinking of her long-range view of what was to come in: it would be a forerunner of David in her thoughts.

RT Very fine. The sisterhood was referred to yesterday. I suppose they would represent formation in grace. There is something formed femininely that holds the ground when the masculine side had broken down. In Hannah's case the priesthood had broken down; but femininely there is something formed in grace that lays hold of the purposes of God concerning Christ and those purposes are not changing.

JAP In the same house there was a man who said, "Who is the son of Jesse?", but his wife knew. I was thinking of what you said about the public disorder that is round about us. Men are saying, Who is the son of Jesse? but there are some that know. I think we are among them through grace.

RT I was thinking of that word in the Psalm, "*I* have anointed my king upon Zion, the hill of my holiness", Ps 2: 6. Abigail laid hold of that, that God had anointed His king upon Zion, but there is a whole system under Saul that rejects him. Abigail brings in this touch. When you come to the throne, she says, this shall be no stumbling-block.

JS While she was publicly linked with Nabal, she did not take on his character; she rather had—I was thinking of Peter's expression—the hidden man of the heart. That is what sustained her: while she had not met him up to this point she had taken on his features.

RT I think she is a very fine product of Samuel's ministry. The prophetic word, what God has said about Christ. "Whom, having not seen, ye love", 1 Pet 1: 8. We await the time when we see Him, as the hymn says—

> And shall we see Thy face,
> And hear Thy heav'nly voice,
> Well known to us in present grace? (Hymn 270)

It was well known to Abigail, through Samuel's ministry. But what you say is interesting. The reason for it on the other hand was that she maintained a judgment about Nabal and that is a test for us today. She maintains her judgment about what is opposed to Christ and discerns the ugly features of it; she is able to name the kind of man he is. Though it is very close to her, she maintains a judgment about it. And we need to be sharpened in our judgments in view of appreciating the One that God has anointed as His King.

ASH Is Abigail here speaking in a priestly manner in the way she says these things to David?

RT Yes, she is in the light of God's purpose. She is functioning in the light of what God has said about him. What she is able to say is very rich: it is grace formed in her, working to maintain the standard when things are falling below it. So she has a judgment of how God is going to deal with matters and she waits God's time. That is a very fine feature of grace, that she does not take matters into her own hand to slay Nabal, she does not take up the sword to deal with the

opposition, but in the confidence that God will bring about things in His own time, she rests in that and she acts in the light of it.

ASH It is very fine. At the end of verse 31 she says, "And when Jehovah shall deal well with my lord, then remember thy handmaid". That is very striking.

RT It is. She does not take up to set things right publicly. She leaves God to deal with Nabal; she says, Jehovah will deal with your enemies, sling them out from the hollow of the sling, all to make room for God's king. He was already anointed. That was the spring in her affections that God had already anointed His king upon Zion. God has already anointed Christ and He has placed Him in this position awaiting the public display. The length of time or the opposition does not change God's thoughts or Abigail's thoughts or appreciation of David.

EFC She helps David from besmirching the testimony by reason of his intention of coming with the sword. But then she says that he will deal with him from the hollow of the sling. I wonder if that refers back to the sling with which he slew Goliath.

RT I think she learned that.

EFC Instead of the sword, he used the sling.

RT She learned that, but she leaves the judgment to God. We are not to set things right publicly but we are to maintain the light of Christ's exalted position and to judge and order things in relation to the exaltation of Christ.

GDR In true feminine affection, she is thinking of 'the young men who follow my lord'. How delightful that she has part in setting on something for their provision and sustenance of life! As many would know, in this city we had a brother who through conflict continued to feed the brethren—in the face of conflict go on with the truth.

DMW Would there be an allusion in what she brought that would be a blessing, and be given to the young men, to what was set on, as to the service of God that exists today?

RT It was very sustaining kind of food, two hundred loaves, two skin-bottles of wine. There are the skins and the wine there, of which we were speaking, both preserved together. And five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, raisin-cakes; there was nothing to be prepared. It was all ready, 'Come and dine'. I think what has come up is good—the provision is there in the conflict to turn the edge of things, to stop the disaster. The inroads that the enemy is making are met in this rich supply of food, and in the appreciation she has of God's thoughts about Christ.

JS In this rich provision, does she herself become a channel of grace to set aside anything that might have besmirched the testimony? It is a very positive way that things are met, is it not?

RT It is. She made haste and took these things: she hurries to step into the breach. You see Paul coming in with these things; "But of him are *ye* in Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God", 1 Cor 1: 30. Think of Paul bringing in these things in the midst of the confusion, the sorrows that were there, to lift the brethren, to prevent the disaster, to bring in peace. Well, we need grace. What grace in the preparation of these things and to have them to hand when they are needed!

EFC Is it not touching the many times in scripture that the goodness of God leads men to repentance? It is the goodness of God that softens and disarms a person.

RT That is true. But this is further on than the goodness of God and repentance. She has nourished her soul in the teaching of grace and this wine and those loaves I think are all part of the teaching of grace. There is something formed ready to hand. She does not have to go and look up the books and see what she is going to do when the crisis arises; she already has to hand what is needed to meet the situation.

KAK Her formation is remarkably parallel to David's. We began looking at David as he was taken up and anointed of God, he was ruddy, and besides of a lovely countenance and

beautiful appearance. It says the same thing of Abigail when she is taken to be his wife. Could you help us with that?

RT It is what grace does, grace reproduces itself. The source is in God, it is in Christ and it must reproduce itself, the true grace of God. We are exhorted to "be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus", 2 Tim 2: 1. It must reproduce itself must it not? As you say, it is very fine that what comes out is a likeness to Christ. It is fine too the insight she has; in verse 30 she says, "when Jehovah shall do to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning thee". Do we know what God has said about Christ? Have our hearts been nourished in God's thoughts about Him? "This is my beloved Son", Matt 3: 17. God has arranged the whole universe to come to be centred in Christ, and Abigail had been nourished in that through the prophetic word. She had the light of the counsels of God concerning His Son.

CFD This beautiful prophetic word and her vision involved in it results in the protection of David, does it not? He is protected by this sister with this prophetic word, so that the testimony is no way blighted.

RT She is a type of the assembly in its beauty and its discernment, "blessed by thy discernment". That is greatly needed these days, that the assembly can function in her true dignity discerning what the circumstances are. I think the discernment comes from appreciating what God has said concerning Christ.

JAP She said 'he fights the battles of my Lord' but his proposed battle with Nabal would have been his own battle: she saved him from that. We often justify ourselves but it is the Lord's battles we should be concerned about.

RT Yes. Judgment belongs to God and the execution of the judgment belongs to God. She is not executing it, she had opportunity. It would have been a fairly easy matter when Nabal was drunk for her to have taken things into her own hand but she does not; she leaves the execution of the judgment to God. But enshrined in her heart is what has been said about David, all the good that he has spoken concerning

thee! How she had gone over Samuel's ministry: "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my heart" (Acts 13: 22), and "Arise, anoint him; for this is he", 1 Sam 16: 12. She had fed her soul on these thoughts of God concerning Christ. I think we need to be nourished in that, "all the good that he has spoken concerning thee".

CFD So she stands out as leaving the judgment with God. That principle still applies, does it not? The tendency might be for some of us to reach out beyond our boundaries, but she was prepared to leave the matter with God, having confidence in God that He would see it through.

RT Yes. The execution of the judgment is something that God is doing Himself. We have to have a judgment about things, but the execution of things is in God's hand and our position is to be nourished in how God has anointed His King upon Zion, the hill of His holiness.

HGH So Abigail fulfils the word that Paul tells the Romans, "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good", Rom 12: 21. That is grace.

RT With Abigail, as you say, it is very beautiful, she keeps the positive things, she brings in this rich, strengthening food supply because her heart is formed in what God has said about Christ, concerning His King. He was already anointed. The coming out of it awaits God's time, but she is in the light that He has already anointed His King upon Zion.

RBH I was impressed with how she was able to be like this when she is abiding in the conditions in which she is. She recognises that in Nabal folly is with him; but in these conditions she is able to have all this food. We can be overcome by what we see around us.

RT But does it not show that the very circumstances bring out grace upon grace. Her heart was nourished in it, in the most trying circumstances. As you say, folly is with him; he had never been anything else, but in these circumstances, she found grace and received of His fulness, grace upon grace, as nourished in what God had said, "the good that he has spoken concerning thee". You think of her in her own moments going

over Samuel's ministry, over what God had said, that He had removed Saul and had found David, "a man after my heart". What meaning she must have read into those words, God said, I have found David my servant. He took him from the sheepfolds to feed His people. Publicly things did not look like that, but she was nourished in God's appreciation of Christ.

EFC Would you say she is a sister of influence? She had her young men, verse 18, and then she had her maids later on. I was thinking of the other two sets of young men in this chapter. Are they not something to take account of? Nabal's young men were faithful to a right report concerning David, and David's young men and then Abigail's young men.

RT That is a good subject. She had a good influence. A lot of disasters and sorrows have happened among us. Can we bring in a right influence that young people will be held rightly, in the presence of Nabal, to come under the influence of Abigail? I think it is largely effected on the one hand by the food supply and on the other by appreciating that God has anointed His King upon Zion.

GDP Does she represent one who is prepared to come down: she is ready to take the iniquity on herself? "Upon me, my lord, upon me let the iniquity be", chap 25: 24. I thought of being formed in grace and being like Christ the source of grace.

RT That is very fine. Can I take the blame? I think in the light of the anointing, that God has set His King upon Zion, we can afford to take the sorrow home to ourselves. It was not hers. She could well say, Oh, it was that man, I did not know what he was doing. She could have hidden behind it, rightly in a sense, but she takes the responsibility. Can we do that today? Are we in the light of the anointing enough to take upon ourselves the shame of Christendom and the breakdown in which we have had a part: upon me let the iniquity be. What you are bringing in is very good. Then there is the food and the anointing; these things go together, do they not? The shame and sorrow for the moment, and yet nourished in the appreciation of what God has established in Christ.

JS While God takes issue with Nabal, there is a point when he hears about this thing and it says, "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone". Do you think the enemy is defeated by this action and his influence is negated, although a certain time elapses before God takes final issue with him?

RT God will make way for the marriage of the Lamb, will He not? He will make way for David and Abigail to come into the joy of the affinity there is between them and God makes way in His own time that these things are enjoyed. But there is a very strong secret link with Abigail and David, as has been said, both in their features and their likeness, and it is awaiting the public time. So that we are able to hold the ground in view of the day when there will be the time of the marriage. We feel tested by these things as to the teaching of grace, what it has formed in us, that holds the ground. Keeping the house for His soon return, presenting things in the light of what is true and what is proper to God's thoughts about Christ. She says, "and shall appoint thee ruler over Israel". He had already done it; for Abigail he was already king. Though Saul was still on the throne and a system that allowed Nabal to flourish, but her heart is full with God's thoughts concerning Christ—"and shall appoint thee ruler over Israel". I think there has been more than enough said to encourage our hearts as to the grace that is there that we may be drawn to be formed by it and to be loyal and faithful in this suffering time, while we await the time of His soon return. I think we should leave with that word that God has already anointed His King.

NEW YORK

4th November 1995

List of initials at the end of the fifth reading

GRACE—V

Ephesians 3: 14-16; 1: 1-7

RT We would count on the Spirit serving us so that something of the atmosphere of love that we have already enjoyed may be among us. I think that generally what we experience at the Supper is, in a sense, difficult to formulate: we cannot put labels on it exactly. John deals with things in that way too. These passages may serve for the Spirit to give us some impression of the Father's pleasure and His delight in having sons before Him. Other families, I think, are, in a sense, waiting to be named but I think we already come into the experience of the Father naming us. The Lord says, "the Father himself has affection for you", John 16: 27. We come to know that already. We spoke this morning about Jacob saying to Joseph as to his sons, Bring them to me, Gen 48: 9. Earlier, Jacob had sent Joseph out to look for his brethren to see after their welfare, and they, in principle, crucified him. The Jews crucified Jesus: that for the moment has shut them out from their blessing. The next time Jacob saw Joseph he had these two sons with him. Think of his joy in seeing them, as we apply it, and he says, Bring them to me, and he blesses those two sons before he blesses the other tribes. That brings us to the present time, while Israel awaits their blessing. Jacob blessed, embraced and kissed those two sons. Later on he goes over Reuben and Levi and the others. I mention that to show how at the present time we have come into the blessedness of what other families will come into later.

I thought in chapter 1 we might get some impression of what that blessing is, as being chosen and marked out and taken into favour. I think there is some sense there of the Father's delight in this family at the present time. We are to feel our way in these great things, which are, as I have said already, beyond what we can formulate, but we count on the Spirit giving us some touch that would remain with us and help us to move here in the light of the Father's favour. What a thing to enjoy in present circumstances and surroundings the sense of the Father's favour!

JAP Hebrews 2, "Bringing many sons to glory", v 10—is that the Father's operation?

RT Yes, it is. As that passage says, it involved the sufferings of Christ and the place that Christ has in God's ways of love. Think of His delight in bringing them to glory! It says, of the Father—"of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named". I think at the moment we come into some experience of the Father's distinctive blessing.

JS He says of these two sons, "they shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon", Gen 48: 5. Does he elevate them to the full status of sonship?

RT Yes, 'they shall be mine'. I think they come into a privileged position. Every family will enjoy sonship, but at the moment there is only one family that has already come into the joy of the Father's blessing. As I said, those two sons were blessed before the others. It is interesting, in the passage in Genesis, that Jacob says, Bring them that I may bless them, but the first thing he does is to kiss them and embrace them; he blesses them afterwards. The first thing is he kisses them, it is like the Father's joy in being able to open up the wealth of His house to those that Christ has brought.

EFC We are sons by adoption, are we not, and yet we are taken into such favour? Would that be to distinguish the sonship of Christ personally as distinct from the many sons who are like Him?

RT I think so. He must ever stand out in His uniqueness. The greatness and the distinguishing of the many sons only adds to His distinction. As you say, He has it by right, and He is the firstborn in relation to them all. So it was as Jacob saw Joseph that he says, Who are these? They had some particular character of his features: he must have seen that and he says, Bring them to me.

EFC That links with the thought of 'taken into favour'—the specific request for these sons—like ourselves, would you say, taken into favour in the Beloved?

RT Yes. There is great wealth in these passages; we would feel measured as to what we can touch. But the Spirit may just give us some impression of what joy the Father has in us to open up His house—

Thoughts eternal are unfolded (Hymn 133)

such is the blessing that the Father brings us to enjoy.

LMcF "Bring them to me … that I may bless them". I was thinking of Ephesians 1—"every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ". Is that not a very great matter?

RT It is: we speak carefully; it is not only that the Father has come out to bless us, but 'Bring them to me'. We are brought to where the Father resides, we are brought to His realm. In Christ, He came out to where we were to bless us and met certain circumstances and brought out the best robe and the ring. He brought them out, but here we are brought to Him where He is, as you say, to what is in the heavenlies. We are brought to this realm which the Father has never left.

LMcF So Naphtali is full of the blessing. Can that not be our portion too?

RT "Full of favour". You can understand Naphtali's prayers on a Monday, and his word in the ministry meeting and his part among the brethren; he was full of favour. He was not envious or jealous, no bad feelings, and the Father, as naming every family, would give us to have some sense of the distinction of the name that He places upon us, that we might be acting in the dignity and the favour of that name.

KAK In connection with the scope of the blessing, all the other sons have specific details given as to the blessing, all related to what is earthly, whereas this is simply a blessing. Does that link with the scripture referred to—"every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies"? It is not spelled out in an earthly way, is it?

RT It is not, and yet the wealth of it is to be known. The scripture that was referred to in Genesis is most interesting. As I said already, before he blesses them he kisses them, and really the kiss and the embrace is more than the blessing—in

that sense that is the blessing. The others were blessed but they were not kissed or embraced. What he gives those two sons is to know his kiss and to know his embrace—

Embraced in Thine unchanging love,
Its holy stimulus doth serve
To wake our richest songs of praise,
And claim our hearts without reserve. (Hymn 116)

That is the embrace: we are enfolded in a love that is eternal, a love that is not exactly serving us as to our needs but a love that is embracing us into the wealth and the fulness of what the Father's presence is.

PEM We sometimes sing the hymn which contains the line—

Of love divine the choice. (Hymn 199)

Does that give the setting?

RT Yes. I think it is something to get just a sense upon our spirits that we are brought to where the Father is: He does not come out to name us. Paul says he bows his knees to the Father of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named. And these two sons were brought to where he was—"Bring them to me that I may bless them". So that we are blessed in the environment of the Father's house in heaven. And that was purposed before time began.

GDR Do you think that if we have a sense of being blessed ourselves, we come out as blessers? Is it not needful to be blessers of one another? It is evidently vital because the apostle is speaking of his bowing the knees. There may be a tendency to droop from the glory of all that is before us here, this great matter of the Father's blessing.

RT Yes. I think the apostle is conscious, as we would be in speaking of these things, of limitations, but he is conscious too of a link with One who is beyond limitations who is bringing us into a sphere that is His own. We are accustomed to man's sphere, but I think the apostle here had some sense which he would impart to us of the Father's realm and the riches of His grace. I think we are to live in some sense of our favour

because the other families will come into their place as they see the assembly's place.

GDP As to Ephraim and Manasseh he guided his hands intelligently. Is that, so to say, the superiority of that area of things in relation to what is heavenly?

RT That is very good. So the Father makes no mistakes, "of whom every family". As you say He, we may say, guides his hands intelligently as to every family. Each has its own impress from the Father. I think we can say He has guided His hands intelligently in the present time, that in the gift of His Spirit He has brought us to know something of the wealth of His house that is to be named upon us.

JS Does the family especially bear on the eternal side?

RT I think so, but explain that.

JS I was thinking of this sphere in comparison with that in chapter 1, where a whole mediatorial system is headed up in Christ. I wondered if the family idea touched finality, the Father's disposition to set the families in relation to Himself. Is it the eternal side that is in mind?

RT Yes, I am sure it is. The passage goes on to that—breadth and length and depth and height; it is beyond finite measurements. But I think, as you say, here it is the family idea; the Father will put a name on every family. So that love pervades in the family; the family link is in love. It is not covenant, it is not an arrangement that can break down, but the link in every family is love from the Father. How wide and how glorious are His thoughts; it says, "of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named, in order that he may give you ... to be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man". "Give you", I think, is an indication of what we are brought into. He has not yet given it to Israel, but He has given to us to be strengthened to apprehend something of the wealth and the depth and the richness of His blessing that is upon us.

PEM "The riches of his glory" is immeasurable, is it not?

RT It is. It is His glory, it is beyond what human mind could ever envisage. "The riches of his glory". It was there in purpose, before the world began—"that he may give you according to the riches of his glory ... by his Spirit"; a divine Person there to bring out the wealth and store of love upon this family in which the Father sees Christ and sees those sons, who are worthy of being in his eternal home.

JAP As we would say, they were really grandsons, but the Father's grace elevated them to full sonship.

RT Well, at one time we were without hope, and without God. It says that we were aliens, strangers, having no hope and without God in the world, Eph 2: 12. It is the work of Christ that has remedied that situation, the Christ that Israel rejected has become our Saviour: more than that, He has served us in His grace. But now the Father sees something of the grace of Christ and the effect of the work of Christ in these sons, and He says, Well, I have a place for them, bring them to me.

KAK The Lord Jesus assures us that the Father Himself has affection for us because we have had affection for Christ, John 16: 27.

RT That is an interesting verse. The Father's affection is "because ye have had affection for me". That is how Israel will come into it, they will come back into their blessing when they see the Messiah, and they will begin to repent that they crucified Him. And the Father's affections are stirred because "ye have had affection for me". In the present time we have been awakened to affection for Christ and that affection, I think, has produced something of His character and His features, and the Father says, Bring them to me. The Father does not need to adjust these sons, He does not need to do anything for them. They are suited to the Father's house through the work of Christ. It says, Through Christ by one Spirit we have both access to the Father, Eph 2: 18. We have been made suited to be in the circumstances of eternal love. I think these things are very wonderful and more than language can adequately convey, but they do convey a sense of the

Father's delight and the Father's favour to have us, receiving us from the hands of Christ.

EFC From our side it requires spiritual inwardness, would you say? It is with a view to our being strengthened with power by His Spirit in the inner man, and then that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in our hearts, and then verse 20, "But to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think, according to the power which works in us". Would you say something as to the need for spiritual inwardness in us to be able to apprehend these blessings which the Father has in mind for us?

RT I think the whole economy, as suggested in these passages, has come into activity, that we may be at home in what the Father has purposed. It necessitated the work of Christ, as we said earlier—through Christ by one Spirit. It required the service of these divine Persons, but the end is that the Father is free to embrace and to kiss. There is nothing to be done, the Father has his delight in bringing the sons into the wealth of His house. And as you say, we have the power of His Spirit so that we are not strangers there.

GDP 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. That is the assembly, is it not, in place of Israel?

RT You had better explain that to us.

GDP I thought all the love comes in there after that.

RT The Father's good pleasure to give you it. Yes, that is very fine. That is Ephesians, the Father's good pleasure to bring out the wealth of His house and His love upon these sons. As we have said, He will name every family. He will leave every family with some impress of His delight in them because each family will have some link with Christ and have affection for Christ. I think, at the present time, the assembly is the great vessel that has loved Christ, His bride, His brethren; and the Father has delight in seeing this family and He gives them according to the riches of His grace and of His glory to come into this wealth.

DMW Is this the only family that is marked out beforehand?

RT You could say more about that.

DMW I was thinking of the greatness of the Father, the source of it all, but the greatness of the family. It is as though this family was in the eternal purpose. We know that, in regard to Israel, it is not before the foundation of the world, but from it. Is there something in that?

RT I am sure there is a great deal in it, to emphasise the depth of His love and His joy in those two sons. It takes us back beyond what we can compass: "beforehand" is beyond what we can penetrate into. But the wealth of it comes to rest on our spirits, to awaken fresh songs of praise and glory to the source of all.

DMW To me it is very precious, just to contemplate the wealth of it, and too to consider, in the Lord's own earthly ministry, that on the last day of the feast He cried: He was speaking of the waters that would flow, in reference to the Spirit, John 7: 38. It is as though His ministry particularly at the end would be to prepare His disciples for this day which He referred to as 'that day' and the blessed relationship into which they would come in His absence, which would be the same as He had. Of course He is always in the place of pre-eminence.

RT I think it is very beautiful the way the Lord speaks and especially as He leads on to John 17, to bring them to see that the place that He had was to be their place. As you said, in that passage He is assuring them that the Spirit would come. Then in John 17 He says, The place that I have is your place, that they might be before the Father in Him. So the first of the things to which he refers in chapter 1 is "he has chosen us in him". Choice is a very fine thing. I think it would connect with what you have said, that it is "beforehand". Choice is selective; He will name every family, as we have said, but at the present time He has chosen us. His love would exercise itself in choice. That is what Paul is saying here, "he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation".

CFD I think this side that you are speaking about is very precious, because in the beginning of Ephesians you go from

what is chosen in Christ before the world's foundation, but then in verse 7 you come back to the side of responsibility, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences". These first few verses relate not only to the fact that we were chosen in Christ beforehand for adoption but the full thought of sonship is coming to light. I think what you have said about John 16 bears a little opening up. Chapter 13 begins that He came out from God and was going to God, but chapter 16 involves that there is cause for the Father loving Him. There is leverage. Why? Because He came out from God and they believed that. And you go on to chapter 17 from that point, do you not?

RT Yes, I think so. "Because ye have had affection for me", produces likeness. Affection for the Son produces sonship's features, and you may say that that is what catches the Father's eye, and He says, Bring them to me. There is a place for them. The world has no place for them, but "he has chosen us in him before the world's foundation, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love". Nobody could ever make themselves holy and blameless, it is only by the Father's love, that He gives us a sense of how what came in in time has been removed.

CFD This section is all according to the purpose of God, is it not? It is not a question of being morally qualified or something like that, but God operating from His own side according to His own grace.

RT Yes. In the first chapter in Ephesians the work has all been done, and now in this section the doors have been opened and there are persons who through Christ by one Spirit are worthy to enter in, and what they enter into is the wealth of love that we are "holy and blameless"—is a very fine combination of these two things—"before him in love".

GDR So that "taken us into favour" is from the divine side. Would you enlarge a little on the matter of likeness, because that seems to suggest formation, that we have been engaged with? The responsible side is not altogether lacking, is it, if we are going to reach to this?

RT No, I think it is reached in love: "Because ye have had affection for me". I think affection for Christ has removed the unholiness and the features that sin has marred and it brings us into this realm of the Father's love. You think of what sin brought into the race; the way love has moved out from God has brought us back to Him to enjoy what was there before the introduction of sin. It says, "before the world's foundation".

CFD Is this the way divine love appropriates us, so to speak, as we approach God in the service? You are approaching, and you are without stain, without spot, without wrinkle, it is all according to the purpose of God.

RT Mr Darby says—

> He, who to His rest shall greet thee,
> Greets thee with a well-known love. (Hymn 76)

—a love that has served us in the circumstances of the wilderness, but now a love that is able to open out its storehouses as He brings us into the wealth of those heavenly blessings that were purposed before the world's foundation. It is a very fine thing to get a sense that what we have come into was purposed before ever sin came in, and we were chosen. It is something that David enjoyed; when David was speaking to Michal he says, It was God who chose me instead of your father, 2 Sam 6: 21. He passed by Saul, and chose David. What a sense to have in our spirits that we have been chosen! Saul was passed over; and He has passed over many others, and at the moment other families are in abeyance, but He has chosen us in Him. I think the sense of choice would give us a fresh sense of the love of the One who chose us.

LMcF Would you say a word as to the spiritual blessings—that is the character of the blessings, "every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ"? Maybe you could enlarge on that, please.

RT No, I could not. But it is all you will need for eternity. You will not need earthly blessings or material blessings, you will not need a new suit in eternity or any of these things. All that you will have through the eternal day are the spiritual

blessings and they are all coming out of the Father's store-houses.

LMcF It all lies in the Spirit.

RT And they exceed all other blessings—spiritual blessings. I think that is what we need for the environment in which we are going to be eternally, but the sense of them is on our spirits and conveyed to us by the Spirit now while we are in this condition. Spiritual blessing is something that time and feelings can never destroy, because He has blessed us with every blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.

ASH We were speaking about "he has chosen us in him", I was wondering about the end of the verse—"before the world's foundation". What can you say as to that.

RT You can only bow in worship to the One who was there. God was there in His own environment and in the counsels of His love and before He founded the world, He chose the persons. We may say the world was only the stage in which He was going to work out His thoughts and that stage will be removed. But before ever the stage was set up, He had the persons in His mind and He chose them.

HGH So these spiritual blessings come down to include eternal life as we can enjoy it today?

RT Yes, there is a great range of them enjoyed today. All that was in my mind was to convey something of the Father's heart. The blessings, you may say, are endless in the great range and wealth that attaches to them, but we are brought not only to the blessings but to the Blesser. The Father is the source of them all.

HGH Knowing the place we have before the Father and knowing His love is all part of the spiritual blessings.

RT What Paul says here, "Blessed be the God and Father"—however great the blessings are, what he is engaged with is the Person, the source from whom all the blessings are flowing. So, as blessed, the response is, "To him who loves us". Response is to the Father the great source of all.

HJG Is Paul especially able to bring out the wealth of this because of the impression he had in his own soul, when he said, "the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me", Gal 2: 20. Is this traced back to that, and it specially fitted him to be able to bring out His will?

RT I think so. In eternal conditions we will never be outside our link with Christ or our appreciation of Christ, because it says, "in the heavenlies in Christ". If it was not named like that, we would be lost. Even in Ephesians 3 where it speaks about the great wealth of things it says, "to know the love of the Christ". There is what is immeasurable in the breadth and length and depth and height, but there is a point of identification, and will be through all eternity, and that is Christ in His varied features and glories. So that things are made tangible; they are heavenly blessings but they are in Christ.

JAP What the father did in Genesis, kissing and embracing, would instil confidence in those young men; they would not be afraid, they would be welcomed in the father's presence. Would that be experienced on the first day of the week?

RT It would. Yet the kiss and the embrace is only the introduction to set them at ease. The wealth of the house is open to such persons. You go into the recesses of the house and what you find is that there are things that were before the world's foundation. Think of the great wealth that has come into time of the knowledge of the Father and of God! What a fresh sense it gave David of His love, that He 'chose me instead of your father'. I think Michal was ridiculing him at that time, criticising his liberty. But he says, The liberty I have is because He chose me instead of your father.

GA How would the younger son in Luke 15 fit in? "The father said to his bondmen, Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it", Luke 15: 22. He would be coming into this position?

RT I think so. The best robe was the sense of what the Father had purposed for him. It was not only for the son, but I think the best robe, and the ring and the shoes, in one sense, were so that the Father might have His full joy in him. He saw

him as suited and in the full liberty of the house and embraced in the love that belongs to the house. So He has brought these things out to us in the gospel—the robe, the ring and the shoes—and He would have us to be moving in the true dignity that He has placed upon us, and in the joy of the ring and the shoes.

KAK Do we learn this by experience? I was thinking of Paul's own experience, and Israel too came into it through experience. God says, Jacob have I loved, Mal 1: 2.

RT We have a foretaste of the fulness of it, have we not? I think the experience would be at the Supper, and, as we speak of it like that, we have a sense of being clothed, as our brother has said, with the wealth that belongs to the house. So it awakens a true response, a suited response to the outshining of such a love.

GDR Does the apprehension of the wealth of the blessings—"who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing"—involve transformation in 2 Corinthians 3? Is there not a need for the transformation? It never says that we are changed back again, but being transformed involves something permanent. Would that be necessary in view of the apprehension?

RT That is how we come into it on our side, in experience from glory to glory, but in Ephesians you come into the full blaze of things. You get some sense of the fulness of the sunshine coming out, and we are not blinded by it because it is in Christ. And then it says it is "through Jesus Christ to himself". So that the experience is that we are alongside Christ, and He is alongside us, you may say. "Bring them … to me"; Joseph brought them to him. It was not that they were there alone, but they were there in that One well-known, and sustained to take on the glory to which you refer.

JS Would you say something about the part the Lord and the Spirit play in bringing us in? I was thinking of "through him we have both access by one Spirit", as if not only things have been brought out to us but the way has been opened up, and the Lord and Spirit are active in bringing us into the present enjoyment of it. It impresses me the greatness that

this is not to be deferred. Not only has the way been cleared by the death of Christ but the Persons are there to take us into the very greatest of the heavenly blessing.

RT In that verse you get the impression that, in "through Christ and by one Spirit", the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit have stationed themselves at the threshold, as it were, so that we come into the Father's house as enriched. I think the words "through" and "by" would involve that there is something imparted, so that we come into a realm that is immeasurable, but we are there at home in it. So it brings out the service of love of divine Persons, that the great end is that the Father may unfold the eternal wealth of His house to rest on our spirits to awaken praises to His great name.

KNP Is the impartation that you are referring to more than "holy and blameless"?

RT I think "holy and blameless" enables us to enjoy the full wealth of the house. It reminds you of the heavenly city and that certain things will be done away. There will be no more crying, no more tears, the sea will be done away; the things that have come in in time and through sin are eradicated in the power and ways of His love and we are there in a new condition to enjoy the fulness of what was there before the world's foundation. You feel the limitation of language, but we count on the Spirit leaving some impression of the wealth of what the Father would bring us into as He has His delight in what has been formed in the grace of Christ.

JMcI I think it is helpful what you are bringing before us, the thought of nearness. I was looking at, "having made known to us the mystery of his will". That should impress us and greatly help us to be more in the gain of these things, would you say?

RT Yes, indeed. The hymn says—

> Thoughts divine conceived in purpose
>
> There expands in glory's light. (Hymn 83)

That is something of the wealth we come into here. 'Thoughts divine conceived in purpose', no man had a hand in it; it is according to the great purposes of His will. They are conceived

in purpose, but the hymn says, 'There expands in glory's light'. They take on a new meaning. Those thoughts were there in purpose but here there are persons coming into the purpose and the glory that is conferred upon them. These references, "chosen us" and then "marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ", are the operations of divine love.

EFC The two sons of Joseph seem to fill out in the divine plan what God had in mind in their progress into the land; they filled out the circuit around the ark, that was one thought in the divine mind, and then taken in even as Reuben and Simeon. They are given that same position as the others.

RT So if men adopt sons they could never impart their nature, but God imparts something of His nature through adoption. He places us beyond the legal position; He imparts something of His nature. So it says, "for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself"; there is something of the character of that Man imparted.

EFC Divine sovereignty lies behind all this, does it not, in the choice?

RT Mr James Taylor made a remark that choice goes further than sovereignty, vol 46 p287. Sovereignty enters into it but there is a distinct sense of love in choice, is there not? There is love in sovereignty too, but choice gives you the sense that you are selected. There is that difference in it, I think.

EFC I have always understood that sovereignty is linked with His purposes and counsels, and we had no part in it.

RT But in choice there is a definite object. David said, He chose me. It was not only He had passed over Saul; that was one thing, but He said, He chose me. Sovereignty no doubt enters into it, but the sense of choice was what rested on David's spirit. And when David went in to speak to God he says, You have thought about me according to those of high rank, 1 Chron 17: 17. He had a sense of choice that he was brought into the purposes of divine love.

EFC God makes no mistake in His choice because He chooses persons who will be constituted morally as well as spiritually equal for the position in mind for them.

RT So that it says, "he has chosen us in him". God looked on to Christ in His manhood as able to effectuate those purposes and bring them all to pass. So He chose us in Him; it was not an indefinite thing, but He chose us in the Man of His choice, to bring us into these counsels of divine love.

PEM It says, "through Jesus Christ to himself"; that is like bringing them "to me", is it?

RT That is a very fine expression. Not only to bring us to heaven but "through Jesus Christ to himself" and "according to the good pleasure of his will". You get the impression as Paul is writing this that there is one wave after another coming into his soul and he feels, as we feel, the insufficiency of language to describe the glory and blessedness of what love has opened up to us.

JAP The Lord says in John to the Father, "the men whom thou gavest me", John 16: 6. That would be the Father's choice. But then the Lord Jesus says, "Have not I chosen you the twelve?", John 6: 70. What do you say about that?

RT What a sense of favour it must give; choice imparts a sense of His delight. As our brother says He makes no mistakes; it is well thought out, and choice implies something in the persons that are chosen. David sets that out. There is something in the persons. I think that conveys the idea that it is more than sovereignty, there is something in the persons that attracts the Father's eye. He chose us; there was something there that He is going to have for His own pleasure and His own eternal delight.

DMW Is that where "through" comes in—"through Jesus Christ"?

RT What would you say about that?

DMW I was struck by your comment with regard to choice. There was something there, and as you said, the Lord Jesus in the mind of God in purpose and counsel was always a Man

in that respect. It would be through Him, it would be something imparted like that One. Does that have to do with choice?

RT Yes. I think that is very beautiful. What He saw was Christ; something there that, as the hymn puts it,

> Thou gav'st us, Father, in Thy love,
> To Christ to bring us home to Thee (Hymn 88)

What He saw there was something that Christ has imparted and it moves the father and he saw those two sons, Bring them to me. The Father, as we apply it in the type, was there in His own home and he says, Bring them to me.

SEMacC Did Paul have something of this experience when he was struck down on the way to Damascus? The Lord said to Ananias, "Go, for this man is an elect vessel to me", Acts 9: 15. Would he have learned something of that choice at that time even though he was in the exact opposite direction?

RT I am sure he would. I think it deepened with him as time went on, because he said, God, who set me apart from my mother's womb, Gal 1: 15. He did not realise that at the time but as he looked back he saw that God chose him, set him apart at that time. And He operated on that occasion you are speaking of to establish what He had chosen.

SEMacC That is what I thought, because Ananias said directly afterwards, "Saul, brother".

RT It reminds you of the psalmist, he said—

> How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!
> how great is the sum of them!
> ... When I awake, I am still with thee, Ps 139: 17

He could not count the greatness and grandeur of God's counsels of love, but he says, "I am still with thee". How wonderful those thoughts are and we are embraced in a love that has brought them all to pass and given us today by the Spirit some foretaste of the richness and wealth of that inheritance that we are called into.

RBH "Chosen us in him", but then the later title "the Beloved"; Joseph was the father's beloved.

RT I was hoping we may get some touch on that, "taken us into favour in the Beloved". He does not say His name there. Does it bring out some idea of how precious this Person is to the Father? It just says "the Beloved". It does not say Jesus or Christ but "he has taken us into favour". It is difficult to distinguish some of these things, choice and favour, but the sense of their grandeur and greatness all flows from the One who is the source of all—"chosen us in him" and "taken us into favour in the Beloved".

EFC The two sons of Joseph really represent himself. We do not have the tribe of Joseph mentioned later on; it is his two sons that fill out that position.

RT That amplifies the thought of adoption, because the two sons fill Joseph's place, do they not? That is John 17, that they will come into Christ's place.

EFC Then there is one standard of manhood that God ever has before Him; the divine standard of manhood set out in Christ, would you say?

RT So the need for being taken "into favour in the Beloved", is the standard, is it not? He gives colour to the whole scene, and as He says in John 17, That they may be with me, v 24. Now there is never equality, but we come to touch something of no disparity. There is a fine distinction but it needs to be maintained; in the Beloved there is no disparity, we are taken into favour. His distinction is maintained, He is the Beloved, only one Beloved and only one in whom we are taken into favour, but we are taken into a position where we enjoy that favour without alloy.

JS Is it not so that He was the only one who knew the Father's heart and the only one who could impart something of the Father's feelings to them?

RT That is John 17, is it not? He opens out something of His own heart and the Father's feelings. So He says there, "that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them",

He does not say 'on them', but He says, "the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them". And that is "taken into favour in the Beloved", is it not, Christ's place is our place.

ASH The voice from the holy mount said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight", Matt 3: 17. Hear Him, the word was, no other.

RT Here is the effect of hearing Him, that we are brought into favour that belonged to Him. He brings us to share that blessed place that was really His place, but through grace it becomes our place.

NEW YORK

5th November 1995

List of initials

G.Ashby, New York; E.F.Cary, Los Angeles; C.F.Dadd, Plainfield; H.J.Glass, Toronto; A.S.Hinkson, New York; H.G.Holt, Wheaton; R.B.Hill, Toronto; K.A.Knauss, Indianapolis; S.E.MacCready, Rio Grande, NJ; J.Mclntyre, London, Ont.; L.McFarlane, New York; P.E.Munn, Barnet; G.D.Pfingst, Plainfield; J.A.Petersen, Plainfield; K.N.Pye, New York; L.D.Phillips, New York; G.D.Rosenberry, San Francisco; J.Spinks, Grangemouth; R.Taylor, Kirkcaldy; D.M.Welch, Denton

PREPARED FOR GLORY

Ephesians 1: 3-10; 2: 7, 8
Revelation 21: 10, 11

One of the features of which we have been speaking as to the teaching of grace is that it leads us to await the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are awaiting that appearing. The precious fact is that when He appears we will appear with Him. That is what the scripture says, When He is manifested we will also be manifested with Him in glory, Col 3: 4. The scripture we have read speaks of the glory of His grace, which we are to be taking on now. In one sense, as believing on Christ as our Saviour we are fitted for glory. To the thief on the cross, who confessed His name, the Lord says, Today you will be with Me in paradise. We shall be there on the basis of His work of redemption. What He has done in shedding His blood, and has accomplished in that death that He endured, has made a way that the saints may be in glory with Him. But what we have been speaking of is how God's grace has come in to prepare us for glory.

We will not be there as strangers. The grace of God is working today in the riches of His grace to prepare us for glory. We are to be taking it on now. Scripture speaks of the way in which He has moved in His mercy and in His love; "that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory, us", Rom 9: 23. How beautiful that is, that God is preparing us for glory. It is not the time of its display yet; it is still man's day, but the saints are to be taking it on now. I think that is one of the great effects of the teaching of grace that the saints are taking on features of the Man who has already been anointed, features that are foreign to this world but which will be at home in heavenly glory. Mr Darby says in his hymn—

There no stranger-God shall meet thee,

He raises the question—

Stranger thou in courts above!—
He, who to His rest shall greet thee,
Greets thee with a well-known love. (Hymn 76)

He is preparing us in His ways and in His grace to be at home in those courts above. It is a very fine thing that when Christ is manifested, when He appears, the saints will be with Him, adding to His glory, the assembly there with Him. When He comes into display the saints of this dispensation, vessels of mercy, who have been formed in His grace, will be alongside of the anointed Man. God is working to that end, of the saints having their place in glory. The sufferings of the present time to Paul were very testing; he knew what it was to be alone in prison, chained, and afflicted. What sufferings he went through! What pressure came upon him, and yet he says, "our way not entirely shut up", 2 Cor 4: 8. As he weighed these things up he says, it is not worthy to be compared with the coming glory. The Lord would encourage our hearts at the present time that He is preparing us to glory. He is bringing many sons to glory, He is bringing us to be at home in these circumstances that are suited to the enjoyment of His love. This book is very rich in how God has acted in His love that He may secure persons to be at home in the full display of what has come out in this dispensation.

So Paul speaks of how God has acted even before the world began. What wealth he brings into these verses as to the way in which God has moved of Himself, glory the end of His ways. What His ways are working out is what He purposed in Himself. Think of God's heart that He purposed in Himself before the world's foundation, before ever sin raised its head to seek to spoil what He was doing. God purposed and He chose us in Him before the world's foundation that there might be persons secured to display the glory of His grace. Nothing can change the purpose of God. What assurance it gives to the soul, as it did to these persons of whom we have been speaking, to lay hold of God's purposes. Indeed the scripture speaks of the unchangeableness of His purpose, Heb 6: 17. Whatever forces have sought to challenge Him, His purpose remains unchangeable because of the One in whom it is centred. He has found a Man in Christ and His work, by whom all His purpose will be effectuated and those chosen ones will be at home in glory. So he says He has marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself. What movements of love that our hearts can never fathom, God moving of Himself and the

great end and result of it will be to the glory of His grace when God will be glorified in persons formed in features of Christ.

We may speak first of all of the riches of His grace—we have been speaking of some of them—which He has caused to abound toward us in wisdom and intelligence, and made known to us the mystery of His will. What a touch of His grace that God should confide something hidden from the world and men, but in the riches of His grace He has made known to us the mystery of His will, and that all centred upon Christ, the Man of His choice, the One whom He has anointed, as we have been speaking of Him, in Zion upon His holy hill, His King. God has made known to us that the mystery of His will is all centred in Him. It is fine to be able to see how things are working out as we look at Christ. As you look at the book of Revelation you see scenes of confusion upon this earth, confusion in the world and in the air too, but John, in the midst of all these things, is led into the secret of all God's ways, that they are centred in Christ. The book of Revelation becomes intelligible as we see that everything in God's ways is centred in the Man of His choice; things in heaven, things on earth will all be set in their place in relation to Christ. What a touch of His grace that He should give us an insight into His eternal thoughts and purposes! The riches of His grace have come to us to form us so that we will be at home in those circumstances of glory. God speaks of these riches—we have been speaking of some of them too, that God should in grace reach out to settle our debt, and strengthen us by the gift of His Spirit. All these things come into the riches of His grace. But the great end of grace was not only to meet our need but that we will be at home in glory. What an ingathering it will be, the time of display. It is not yet the time of display but that is what grace will lead us into. Today it is being worked out in circumstances that are oppressive. The riches of His grace are forming overcomers, but the great end to which it is leading is "to the glory of His grace". Then there will be something there, as the writer of old says, What hath God wrought, Num 23: 23! What a wonderment it will be! It brings out the substantiality of those riches of His grace. As I say, it has come in to meet the needs but it has really come in to bring us to circumstances of glory. God is looking on to the time of display, awaiting the appearing

of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Man who has been rejected—Mephibosheth's King—when he will come in peace. All nations shall adore Him, their gold and tribute bring. What a day it will be when He appears in His glory and in His majesty, when He who has been denied His rightful place will be seen and every knee shall bow before Him, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Well, dear brethren, we are looking on to that. Indeed the enjoyment of His grace would form us so that we are longing to see Christ publicly owned, to see the full result of His work in what He has done in redemption, what He has done for God and what He has done for men. Think of what He has done for God, that God in righteousness will bring in a scene where He shall dwell with men! It says the tabernacle of God will be with men. These things have all been effectuated by what Christ has done and they will be displayed. How full and rich will be the time of display! The apostle speaks of it time and again so that we should be looking for it. We should be longing that He will have His rightful place; He who suffered once must reign. The whole creation will break forth: Worthy art thou. It is beautiful that chapter in Revelation 5 when he is seen in His worthiness. The whole scene changes as Christ comes into His place, when He takes up His rights, when He is seen as the One who is the great operator, the One who has made a way for God to have His pleasure in men. It says that we are to be "to the praise of the glory of his grace". No one else could have accomplished what He has brought out of this scene of confusion, where sin has disrupted everything. What God is bringing out of it will be to the praise of the glory of His grace. God is awaiting it and we are awaiting it too. Soon it will be seen in display in this vessel of which we read in Revelation, having the glory of God. That display is not something that is going to happen miraculously. We sometimes think in relation to the day to come that there will be a sudden change; it will be that, but I think what comes into display is being formed now by the riches of His grace. What John saw was the holy city, Jerusalem. Think of what Jerusalem had been in man's hands, what inroads the enemy has sought to make in that city. But here it is, the glory of His grace seen in this holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God; a creature vessel—ever that—and yet it is unique, "having the glory of God". That is what the riches of

His grace has effectuated, that there is a vessel there having the glory of God. As this chapter brings out it is a very substantial thing. It will be the wonder of the universe, not only will Christ be admired, but so will this city in which is displayed the glory of His grace. It says, "having the glory of God, Her shining ...". There is something about her that is formed in the time of pressure, in circumstances of sorrow producing character that is suited to the time of display. God will not display anything of man, what will be displayed in a creature vessel is something that is entirely heavenly in character. I think the precious stones speak of some of the riches of His grace in the foundations. It says, "and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb". The riches of God's grace were seen in the apostles, in what was formed in them that bore something of the character of Christ. Think of Peter and these others, what they endured in the way of suffering when here as despised men. Paul speaks of himself, and it would be true of the others, regarded as the offscouring of the world, 1 Cor 4: 13. Despised, set at nought by men and the enemy's forces against them, but here they are displaying the glory of His grace as their names are in the foundations, the twelve apostles of the Lamb. How like Christ they were and how like Christ is every feature in this city, in these stones of which we have been speaking and too in the gates. Think of the administration of the city, and then the pearl and the precious stones, something there that is the shining in glory. But my point is that it is being formed now. It is not something unreal, it is something that His grace is forming now that will be at home in the time of display.

Well, it is not far off, dear brethren. We already have some insight by the Spirit into what it is to be at home in scenes of heavenly glory and to taste something of the sweetness of that love. It is very precious that John writes about the dwelling of God before he speaks of the display of grace. In the order of it, the latter part of the chapter historically would come before the beginning of the chapter, but John is speaking of the preciousness of the assembly's portion as the dwelling place of God. It is the way, I think someone has said, a lover would write; it is far more precious to a lover to be thinking of dwelling than of the time of reigning. How great an influence this vessel is going

to have in the day to come when God will be known in the city! The glory of His grace will be seen as God will be known in her palaces and in her gates, "Her shining was like a most precious stone, as a crystal-like jasper stone". Then it says, too, that the nations shall walk by its light. I bring in these things to show the greatness and grandeur of what is being formed in the present time by the glory and riches of His grace, that will shine in the day of display, when the world to come will be enriched by what God is doing today, "the nations shall walk by its light". We walk today in the light of Christ and what has come in in the revelation of God in His grace, but here those nations are going to come into things through the assembly enjoying her portion—they will walk by its light. It says its gates shall not be shut at all by day; the position that the assembly will fill in God's administration will benefit the whole earth as enriched by the outshining in display of what God is doing today. May it encourage our hearts. As Paul says, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory". Paul knew the sufferings far deeper than any of us, but he also knew something of the glory. He said, "I know a man in Christ", 2 Cor 12: 2. He had some insight into those courts, as to the place that men were to have in glory through the riches of God's grace, and it was far more to him than the present suffering, so he was awaiting the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. May we be given strength, dear brethren, to be awaiting the appearing. As it says, When He is manifested we will appear with Him in glory (Col 3: 4), a suited companion. There will not be the King and His subjects exactly, there will be the King and His consort, there will be Christ and the assembly—appearing with Him in glory. I think that is the great culmination, that there is a vessel being formed to be His consort, to be alongside Him, to be with Him, all to enhance the glory that belongs to Him because the Man is not complete without the woman—Christ and the assembly. The place that the assembly is to fill in this chapter opens our eyes in wonderment that the whole universe will be enlightened by her shining. But the first thing is that Christ is to have His joy in His assembly. What a joy it will be to Him! The marriage of the Lamb has come, the bride is there, as the Lamb's wife, in all her beauty enriched through what is taking place in the present time.

May our hearts be encouraged. In the days in which we are we are apt to look on them and be discouraged by the sufferings of the present time, but may we be enriched and strengthened to endure. That is a great feature of the Lamb's wife that she is able to endure, and be faithful in the time of His absence so as to be, as I have said already, a suited consort in the time of display. May we be waiting, proving grace upon grace. "For of his fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace" (John 1: 16), and here is a vessel in which that fulness is resident. It speaks about it like that, "the fulness of him who fills all in all", Eph 1: 23. We are being filled at the moment, dear brethren. May our hearts be capable of taking it in so as to have a true valuation of our calling, so that the enemy may not discourage our hearts through the weakness and pressures and the sufferings of the present time; but may we be encouraged to be looking for the glory to see that what is being formed now is something that is taking on these heavenly features. The assembly will not be strange to those courts or to the glory because we are taking it on now; it says, "having the glory of God", a creature vessel still but a glory that is her own. It has been spoken of as a reflected glory, and it may be, but it is her own, it is her glory, she has something that belongs to herself. The fruit of the Spirit's work and the fruit of grace, is something that is unique, that all points to Christ, her Husband, the heavenly Man.

May we be encouraged thus to take on something of it now that grace may have its perfect work so that we are suited through those riches and administrations of love to those heavenly courts in which through grace we will soon have our eternal part. For His Name's sake.

NEW YORK

4th November 1995

WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR THE SINNER

Genesis 3: 4, 5, 7-11
2 Corinthians 5: 18-21
Luke 8: 43-48

The passage in Genesis is speaking of a time when sin had just come into the world; that it is still rampant today hardly needs saying. There are fruits of it all around us. What I would like to speak about for a moment is how man has attempted to meet the matter and on the other hand how God has settled it. The relationship between God and man became disturbed at the incoming of sin. The first thing it brought to man was a guilty conscience. God had been there before, speaking to them; they never tried to hide themselves. God had communed with man, said many things to him; there was perfect relationship. But what sin has given man is a guilty conscience. And every man has that, whoever he may be. If the matter of your sins and peace has not been settled between you and God, the conscience remains guilty. The first thing they did was try to satisfy their conscience. And that is what people are doing today. There are all kinds of things. Sin, because of its abundance, may in people's eyes have lost its seriousness. Some things that in the days of our fathers were considered very serious, today are taken as commonplace. There are even some things that required a penalty in law that are no longer so regarded. That brings out the deceitfulness of sin, working to dull the conscience. My friend, if your conscience has been dulled, may it be stirred tonight that you must have to do with God—you must. That is one great certainty in life or in death that man must have to do with God. There is no escape. These aprons were very poor, what man made. Oh, there are many aprons being made today. We could speak of the apron of entertainment that man has brought in; the apron of sport, that man has made to try not to think about God. Just put it behind us, sweep it under the carpet, do not think about it and it will go away. These are the aprons that men have made. They sewed fig-leaves and made themselves aprons. I suppose they thought it was all right. Maybe you think it is all right. Well, everybody else has sinned, everybody else does this or does that, you may think it is

commonplace and it is all right, you have your apron and you are hiding. Where did they stand, my friend, when God came in and He said, "Where art thou?" Where were their aprons? Could they hide from those simple words? Could they hide when God raised the question, "Where art thou?" The whole thing is exposed. The whole working of what men have erected as a barrier is exposed. He brings in one excuse after another. But the aprons that they had made were no use. There is no hiding place, my friend, for man today save in Christ. What a multitude of hiding places has sprung up in the world. My friend, there is only one hiding place that I know; it says, "And a man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind" (Isa 32: 2), a man, the Man Christ Jesus, God's Man. It says, a Man shall be a covert from the storm, a hiding-place from the wind, as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land. A Man, who is a different man, a Man who has come in from God. God has come to remove the distance and settle for time and eternity, for you and for me the question of sin and our sins. And, my friend, He has done it to perfection. There was a man of old who raised the question, "How can man be just with God?" Job 9: 2. What could he do? What could Adam do? Very hastily, I suppose, he made those aprons, and through the course of time how many attempts have been made. But what can man do to be just with God, a God whose holiness is intrinsic in His being, a God who is of purer eyes than to look on sin. How could a man be just with God save that God from His own side has come in; in the Person of Christ. It says, "God was in Christ", God was there. The history books would tell you there was a man who was here called Jesus, they would tell you something about Him without distinguishing Him perhaps from other men. But it says more than that here, it says, "God was in Christ"—God was there. One of the prophets looked on to that; as he was looking for salvation he says, He will come Himself. Oh, how precious! He will come Himself and save us, Isa 35: 4. He did not only send Isaiah, and the other prophets, but the prophet had some sense that He will come Himself. And what a difference when He came Himself. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself". Oh, what power, what grace, what love was there when God came in in the Person of Jesus. He did not come with angelic forces or power to frighten man, but it says, "God was in Christ"; the most approachable of men.

The One who could lay His hands upon the children, who would take a journey to meet one woman at Sychar's well—God was there in Christ. He was there, my friend, as another writer tells us, undoing the works of the devil, 1 John 3: 8. That woman that we read of came to touch something of that. He was there bringing men on to true ground and true relationships that sin had disturbed and made irreconcilable, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself". Friend how did He do it? He did it in His death. From heaven's point of view the world was never more beautiful than when Jesus was here, because on this earth where every man had dishonoured God, where sin had made such inroads, there was a Man that was in perfect accord with heaven. God's eye was there on Christ and His grace was going out to men to bring them all to that one Man. The effectiveness of that as the writer here is speaking, was all accomplished in that He removed the distance—removed it. How could it be met? You think of the distance that sin had brought in, perhaps not so great between Adam and God, although it was the same in a sense, but in the course of time there is no doubt the gulf had become widened in the things that had come in. Because sin, as the scripture says, became exceedingly sinful (Rom 7: 13) as the race went on. How was it going to be met? It could only be met, my friend, by it being removed. And that is what God has done in Christ, He has removed the distance. That is what reconciliation means, that the distance had to be removed. As most in this company would know, if it was only bridged it could break down, the gulf would still be there. A bridge between two things is a very narrow connection, and the distance and the guilt would still be there. But in reconciliation God has removed the distance because His Son went into the distance. Oh, how dark, my friend, how deep that distance. This passage tells us how deep He went, "Him who knew not sin", He did not know it.

That is why I said there was one spot on this earth of brightness when Jesus was here that had never been before. There was a Man here who did not know sin. There were writers that loved Him, who went over it time and again; one of them said, He did not know it as here, another said, He did not do it, "Who did no sin", 1 Pet 2: 22. That was a man who knew Him,

who had been with Him most of the days of His service and seen Him in every circumstance. As he looked back he says, He did no sin. What a Man. He did not know it, He did not do it. Another one who loved Him says, "in him sin is not", 1 John 3: 5. How precious these testimonies to the Man who went into the distance. Sin was foreign to Him in His character and in His movements and in all that He did; "Who did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth". Oh, the sinless One! How beautifully Peter speaks about Him: "when reviled, reviled not again" (1 Pet 2: 23)—no sin. "When suffering, threatened not"; and perhaps most beautiful of all he says, "but gave himself over into the hands of him who judges righteously". When suffering, that is what He did when He was there tasting the distance, not only measuring it but when He was removing it He gave Himself over into the hands of Him who judges righteously, "Not my will, but thine be done", Luke 22: 42. Oh, what a Saviour. God was in Christ settling the matter Himself to His own glory by a Man who was sinless. It says He was made sin for us. I cannot explain these words; it was what God laid upon Him. We sinners in our being and in our practice, but there the sinless One He was made it. Oh, how dark the world became, my friend, how dark it became. If in earlier days, as I said, it was at its brightest, in those hours it was at its darkest when He was made sin for us. There was the darkest hour in one sense in the world's history; when the perfect sinless Man was made sin. The scripture explains it, it says it was for us. The word vicariously is used; it means He was there in place of us and the judgment of God against sin was poured upon Him. Can you understand it? No, save that it is an expression, an appeal, of the love of God to you and me as to how He has settled the sin question and settled it for time and for eternity for those, I trust you, who put their trust in Him now. So it says, "he has made sin for us". That means that for you and for me the matter is settled. When God does something it is done to perfection. If another had done it there would have been imperfections in the work, but it says, "Him" that is Christ "who knew not sin he"—that is God—"has made sin for us". Oh, what an expression of His love. If an apron would have done for Adam this was what God required. God required that the distance would be removed and He removed it Himself in the Person of Christ. It says, "that *we* might become God's

righteousness in him". What a change. But that "*we*", I raise the question, Are you among them? "That *we* might become", the work has been done, but I think the "*we*" is the persons who come into. You can be among them through exercising faith, and putting your trust in what Jesus has done.

And that is what that woman did that we read of in Luke. She tried the aprons, she tried the physicians, year after year she tried one thing after another. I suppose the remedies poured out in her day just as they do today, every week something fresh coming in but only bringing out the insufficiency of the previous remedies. But the root question still remained. Maybe she got better nights from some remedies but the root question still remained, she was still troubled. Indeed it says she became worse, Mark 5: 27. But she comes to touch the hem of His garment. That is a reference to what is here tonight, the hem of His garment is here in the preaching. Christ Himself has gone into heaven after He bore the weight of sin on the cross, after He bore God's judgment. He exhausted that judgment to God's satisfaction. You say, How do you know it? Because God raised Him from the dead. He who knew no sin was made sin, but the matter was settled, the sin question was met and God raised Him from the grave to the highest place in glory. But the hem of His garment is here in the Spirit's voice in the preaching. God has found His delight in what Jesus has done and in the Spirit's grace and power He is proclaiming His Name tonight that you and I may find how God has met for His satisfaction and for our peace, the question of sin and of sins for time and eternity. This woman did not need any more remedies, she found an answer, she found the remedy when she found the Saviour. But then it says, "immediately her flux of blood stopped". My friend, one act of faith and it is done for time and eternity, she touched the hem of His garment. 'Only a touch' the hymn writer says, the Lord Jesus was there within her reach. It says only a touch, but oh, how much was in it—

Only a touch, would she the venture make?

She did. Will you make it tonight my friend? Will you put out your hand tonight to touch what has come to you? It says, The word is near you, in your mouth, the word of faith, which we

preach, Rom 10: 8. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from among the dead, thou shalt be saved". Oh, those precious words of Romans 10: 9, how precious they remain. And here this woman, believed in her heart, she put out her hand and it says, "immediately her flux of blood stopped". There is the answer to social reform, moral reform and all the rest. It says immediately it was stopped; through faith and touch with the Person, immediately it was stopped.

My sins—Oh the bliss of this glorious thought—
My sins—not in part, but the whole—
Were borne on the cross, and are gone evermore,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

(Hymn 238)

She did not have to wait like the lepers of old seven days outside the camp, but it says it was immediately stopped, never again to be raised. My Saviour, my friend, He bore the whole matter for me. He met God about the whole question, but only if you touch the hem of His garment, only if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth, do you come into the blessedness of the way that God has made. O my friend, do not try any more aprons, do not try any more of the remedies that man has brought in, but tonight reach out to touch the hem of His garment. But you know there is much more. It was immediately stopped. You say that would be enough. Ah, no, He has a lot more in His heart for you than just to forgive you your sins; He said, Who touched Me? He felt it, you know. My friend, you may be one of many, one of fifty or whatever it is in this room, you may be one of millions in this city, but if you exercise faith in the work of Christ tonight, He knows you. There may be only one in a great congregation, as there was here, there were crowds thronging Him. Peter says, They are all touching Thee, Lord, and you say 'Who?' Yes, He knew that woman's touch of faith and cry of need that was so different from the cries of all around, in the mixed multitude. And He knows your cry, He knows what you would be saying in your heart tonight; He says, Who touched Me? Not to give her a sense of shame, no, He says, Who touched Me, to bring her into the family, because the next word He says

is "daughter". That is where grace would place you, my friend. Oh, to come from the distance to come into the family. That is what He does with her, He says, "daughter". No longer a bowed-down daughter, no longer someone crippled. The same woman in the same circumstances but she has come into another family. He says, "Be of good courage, daughter; thy faith has healed thee". You could have said it was His work that healed her, true it was, but she got the gain of it through touching the hem of His garment. His work stands there before God's eye and you are brought into the eternal gain of it through confessing His name as this woman did. And He says, "daughter; thy faith has healed thee; go in peace". What an answer to all man's puny efforts that God has come in and done things according to the power of His grace and of His love and He is appealing to you tonight. The garment is within your reach—

Only a touch. Will you the venture make?

tonight. He was within reach, that is how close His garment came to her. We do not know how many were there, but the garment was within her reach and that is where the gospel comes, within your reach. The reach of your hand, however short it may be—the power is in the hem of the garment and it is just within your reach wherever you are tonight.

My friend, may you reach out not only to know the peace of your sins forgiven but to know the joy of being brought into the family of God. What a family daughter. Oh, how precious these words. Maybe nobody had called her that before. I suppose they would not own her before. The man in John 9, they would not own him. But here is someone who owns her, "daughter". How precious it is to know the Saviour's voice for the first time: calling your name, esteeming you in His love, and leaving on her heart, as He would with yours tonight as you exercise that touch of faith, "Go in peace". May it be so for His Name's sake.

NEW YORK

5th November 1995

"TO NUMBER OUR DAYS"

Psalm 90: 1-6, 12

There is nothing more sobering than to be in the presence of death—a life has finished. God in His wisdom has limited the life of men. It tells us in this passage that God has limited it to threescore years and ten; and if, by reason of strength, it may be longer; but it is limited, there comes an end to our lives whether they be long or short. Moses himself was a man who had lived a considerable time, longer than men would live nowadays, but he lived that life and he is writing about it. And he says, "Teach us to number our days". That is all that we have, a day at a time, and God would have us to be sobered as we are in the presence of death as to what our days are like. Job speaks of them as being swifter than a weaver's shuttle (Job 7: 6); they pass away very quickly. One day comes and another day comes and much of it may be spent in an aimless kind of way, but God would, as I said, sober us that our days may be spent wisely, may be spent rightly. Here Moses speaks of God as being from eternity to eternity. He has made time and He has come into it in the Person of His Son. It says in Scripture, "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son", Gal 4: 4. He came into time to give it meaning. He came into the days of the life of our brother to give it some meaning; his days were spent in relation to the Lord. Man's days without Christ are spent in relation to himself. We live to ourselves and spend our life in our own circumstances, our own things and doing our own will. But the Lord Jesus came into time to teach us the value of what can be accomplished in a lifetime as we number our days in relation to the will of God. The Lord Jesus showed us how to live day by day. He lived in dependence upon His Father; not pleasing Himself but lived here in the service of others. His days were guided by heaven. The Lord Jesus as He was here speaks of morning by morning (Isa 50: 4), He had the Father's word for the day and each day was filled out pleasurable to heaven. So He has shown us how to number our days, how to fill out our lives in relation to God's will. Peter says that the time past has been sufficient to please ourselves

(1 Pet 4: 3); he says henceforth we are to spend our time in relation to the will of God. Our brother came to that and for the rest of the time he sought to be for the pleasure of God. The Lord Jesus in His grace had touched his heart and touched the hearts of many here and He would seek to touch your heart. As He was here in relation to God's will He gave His life, shed His blood to cleanse us from our sins that our lives may take on a definite character. Instead of being carried along in the stream of man's will and the pleasures of sin and the deceitfulness of it the Lord Jesus would touch our hearts that we may turn in relation to serving Him in His grace. What love, what grace He has shown to take away the guilt and the burden of sin that we labour under, that in His grace He would draw us in relation to Himself. So Moses would teach us here that we may number our days. A day has come in our brother's life when those days have ceased and he is now with Christ. His life has not been empty, or aimless. The death of the wicked, the death of the sinner how empty it is; a life has been spent and what has been accomplished in it? A life spent in relation to man's will ends in a sorrowful death, but a life that has been spent in relation to the will of God ends in being put to sleep in Jesus. Our brother's life here is finished but there has been worked out in that life something that is going to be gathered up. When the Lord comes our brother will be raised, something there has been wrought in him that will be suited to find its place in those heavenly courts above. Our brother's days have been counted, not only by him but by those who have known him and have been counted by heaven, and the Lord has ended those days to gather him to Himself. So those of us who are left still have today. How is today going to be spent? Is it going to be that we are brought under the Saviour's touch, to be in relation to the will of God? It says, "that we may acquire a wise heart".

May it sober our hearts that a life has been finished, the days have been ended, but there is something being gathered up from those days that the Lord has gathered to Himself and it will be raised to shine in those heavenly courts. Well, what about our days? Can we look back on our lives—most of us would have regrets and sorrows—but there would be in it for

those who have committed themselves to the Lord Jesus days in which we have learned something of His grace, and of His love. And today those of us who know Him would rest in the comfort of His love. Our dear sister sorrowing, but not as those who have no hope; she is resting in the comfort that those days have been spent in relation to God's will. And in the day of sorrow that we may be facing today we prove the comfort and the grace of Christ. May our hearts be strengthened in it that for the rest of the time, our days may be under the will of God for His pleasure, by His grace and for His glory. May it be so.

NEW YORK

13th November 1995

At a burial meeting

HOW WE MAY BE KNOWN OF GOD

1 Corinthians 8: 1-3
Exodus 3: 3-8
Psalm 89: 20, 21; 132: 1-6
Daniel 9: 20-23

I seek grace for this occasion to speak about being known of God. It may seem a strange thing to speak about because does not God know us all? It says, "there is not a creature unapparent before him ... with whom we have to do", Heb 4: 13. He knows about us all, and yet the scripture speaks here about a class of persons that are known of God. I would like to encourage our hearts to be among them. Men aspire to be known in their own circles, but God has His circle. Many, alas, profess to know Him. The Lord says that many will come and say, You have taught in our streets. In principle they had sat under the gospel, living in a Christian country, but the Lord will say to them, "I do not know you", Luke 13: 27. What a solemn word to persons who have been under the influence of grace, who have heard the appeals of His love, and He has to say, "I do not know you". They claimed to know Him. Another time they said to Him, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren seek thee without". It says He looked around in a circuit and said, "whosoever shall do the will of God, *he* is my brother, and sister, and mother", Mark 3: 35. He knew them by their features, and that is how God knows the persons we are speaking about now, as doing the will of God, prompted, indeed, because they love Him. It says here, "if any one love God, he is known of him". How many profess to love Him, but does that love for Him find an expression in a tangible way? The Lord said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments", John 14: 15.

We have read of some persons whom God knew, and we may be helped in looking at them to see the features that God appreciates. Perhaps the first time God notices us, in the way I am speaking of it, is when we come to Him in repentance. What joy that gives God as He sees persons coming to acknowledge their state and condition, and to lay hold in faith of a Saviour's love and grace. He knew those houses in Egypt

that were sheltered under the blood, He knew them every one of them. Think of the angel coming that night and passing through the land. Some houses were known because they were under the shelter of the blood of the lamb. What a fine beginning, to come under the shelter of the precious blood of Christ. As God would look on such persons, He can say, I know they are forgiven, the question of their guilt is settled. God has acted in His grace and love to free us from liabilities and bondage that we may grow in a knowledge of Himself, so that the love that is begotten in our hearts may come into some tangible expression and God may say, I know him. It reminds me of that house in Luke 7. There was a Pharisee who professed to know, and on the other hand there was a woman who was known of God. Maybe we would over-estimate our love for God, over-estimate our growth; it says, "knowledge puffs up, but love edifies". Of that woman, it says, "she loved much". The Lord knew her as her love came into evidence. Simon went far beyond what was intelligent, he was puffed up, he took himself out of the place of the creature almost, saying, If this Man knew. Think of speaking of the Lord of glory critically like that. But the woman loved much and she was known of God. The Lord says, "Seest thou this woman?" He is looking to see features that He can call attention to, features in the believer that He commends.

Now God saw that Moses turned aside and was interested. Such persons are known in heaven as interested in what God is doing. Here is a man who had been brought up in all the knowledge of Egypt; all the best education that could be obtained, I suppose, was available to him, and here he is interested in what God is doing, "Jehovah saw that he turned aside". God is looking for interested persons today. Have you been interested, my friend, in what God is doing? He is doing wonderful things. He is doing a wonderful thing here, something that caught Moses' attention. I suppose every thorn bush, as the fire came to it, was very readily consumed, but Moses sees one here, and it was not being consumed. It is an allusion to how God is operating, as He says to Moses, "I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them". God would arouse our interest today in what He is doing, in how

He has intervened, in what is proceeding from Himself. He would let us into the secrets of what He is doing.

I have read of Moses and David and Daniel, but they were not yet great men in the sections I have read. I would like to apply it to the beginning of their spiritual history that they become interested in what God was doing. It says that God saw that he turned aside. I wonder if you have ever turned aside? You may be affected by the precious blood of Christ and what He has done for you in redeeming love; but have you ever turned aside to see why He intervened in Christ, why He came into the circumstances that men were in to effect deliverance? It says, "God called to him ... and said, Moses. Moses!" Maybe He has called you. That is how God would speak, to interest you individually, personally. God would call us by name to draw us into something of the wealth and blessedness of what He is doing. I think this is how Moses became great; he became interested in the fact that God had intervened in His power in a remarkable way to effect deliverance. What a God He is that He should take up such a matter. He says, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". He is the God who had made promises to Abraham, calling him out from idolatrous circumstances. Here He is unfolding something of His plan to a man who was interested. O, how Moses endeared himself to God, becoming known as a man to whom God could confide His secrets. I think God is looking for such persons today, persons that can be trusted. I wonder just how does He know you and me. Are we persons who can be trusted with some of His secrets? Do we understand what He is doing and the way He is doing it? Or are we persons who have put our faith and trust in the Saviour, but are, perhaps, too engrossed in our own things to be interested in knowing something of the secrets of what God is doing? How God would appeal to us afresh today to be interested, to see the grandeur and glory and greatness of what He is doing.

Now here is Moses, a lone man, a fugitive from Egypt, in the desert; God is seeing that he has an ear and a heart for what God is doing. It says of him later, "the man Moses was very meek", Num 12: 3. That is how God knew him, a man to

whom He had entrusted His secrets, but a man who developed in another character. I think that is what God would expect in us, the development of another kind of character. He says, "Mouth to mouth do I speak to him openly", Num 12: 8. That is how He knew Moses, it says He spoke with him "face to face, as a man speaks with his friend", Exod 33: 11. Does God know you like that? He has room in His heart and in His ways, and He has time to speak to you face to face as you are interested. Paul, alas, says that we are in a day when "all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ", Phil 2: 21. But here is a man interested enough, in a typical sense, to seek something of the things of Jesus Christ.

This is the beginning of God speaking to Moses, but He did not stop. God continued speaking to Moses. There are very fine touches in these books of God speaking to Moses, "face to face". Maybe we need someone else to tell us things at times, and that has its place. But God is looking for persons whom He knows, that He can speak to in the directness of His love, and unfold to them something of the secrets of His heart. God was not only coming down to bring the people out; He was telling Moses how He was going to bring the people into a good land. Moses could never have envisaged this. We were speaking earlier today of "Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man's heart, which God has prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor 2: 9), and here is God saying that to Moses. O, how God would love to tell you some of His thoughts far ahead. He has already done that. What a vessel He had in Paul to speak concerning Christ and the assembly. He had in Paul, one who was interested enough to spend time to hear what God would say about Christ and the assembly. God says, I know such persons.

He could not have said this to many in this day in Exodus 3, but here is one man who has turned aside, and He speaks to him about bringing the people up into a good and spacious land. It is very beautiful to think of how the affection for that land grew in the heart of Moses. In Deuteronomy, you see there a man whose heart had expanded about this great and spacious land flowing with milk and honey. You say, He

never saw it. Ah, God told him something about it. How else could he speak as he does in those closing chapters of Deuteronomy? It says God showed him the whole land, Gilead to Dan, with all the tribes in it. Moses' heart loved to dwell on these thoughts of God, and God delighted to tell him about that great and spacious land; all because one day he turned aside, and was interested enough to listen to what God had to say. May I make an appeal, in the time when there are so many voices and so much that would command our attention, to turn aside. It means your own closet, it means your own personal links with God. This was the beginning of Moses' spiritual history, and he was given light as to this spacious land, "a land flowing with milk and honey".

Now in applying it to our time, it is God confiding to you something of His choicest thoughts of Christ and the assembly, because that is what it would lead on to. It is a view of the people in the land where they are no longer troubled; He is giving a view beyond the breakdown, beyond the confusion, a land where they could dwell peacefully. Moses loved to describe it. I do not know how he knew so much about it save as God had told him. He says it was a "land of water-brooks, of springs, and of deep waters, that gush forth in the valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive-trees and honey", Deut 8: 7, 8. O how the hearts of the Israelites must have been awakened as they heard Moses speaking about the land. They would say, Have you been there? Why had he been there and they had not been there? It was because he had been interested. In that wilderness with all the desert sand, with all their murmurings, with all their sorrows, he had been interested enough to turn aside and listen to God's thoughts about that land.

God is appealing today for interested persons whom He knows will cherish the thoughts and purposes of His love concerning Christ and the assembly. He will not give it to everybody, "if anyone love God, he is known of him". He is giving it to His confidantes. He is placing the light where it will be cherished. God does not cast His pearls before swine, but He is disclosing the secrets of His love and His purposes to persons who are interested, and who are prepared to spend

time to know something of the greatness of the things that God has prepared for those that love Him. What a stay it was, amidst all the sorrows and pressures that Moses was to bear, that God had told him of the purposes of His love and His affection for the people. That is why Moses was able to bear with them. That is why Paul was able to bear with the Corinthians. God had told him what those persons meant to Him. The Lord said, "I have much people in this city", Acts 18: 10. Was he not tried by them? Did they not criticise him? Did they not bring every device to seek to undermine him? But Paul continued there in the sense of divine thoughts about the saints. Paul wrote back to those maligning him and said, "the assembly of God which is in Corinth". There was a man who had been spending time with God, and was able to see things beyond the actual circumstances; he could see them from God's side, because, I say again, he turned aside.

God says about David, long before he came to the throne, I have found him, as if He was looking for such persons. And that is what He is looking for today. He says, "I have found David my servant". Where did He find him? It tells us in Psalm 78 where He found him, it says that He found him in the sheepfolds. He was not in the theatres of this world; he was not there where men were finding their pleasures. It says, "he chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds", Ps 78: 70. What a fine thing that God should choose a man like that. The people chose Saul, but God did not choose Saul, indeed He says that He had rejected him. Was there not a lot that commended Saul? There was much that commended Saul to the people. But—

> … he chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds—
> From following the suckling-ewes.

I think it means he kept among the brethren, to put it simply in our language. He kept himself where the sheep were being fed, where they were being shepherded. He had love for the brethren. You would not find Saul there. You do not find David's brothers there either. Eliab and the others were not in the sheepfolds, they were following Saul, they were going

with the crowds, they were racing for the battle. Here David is, a man in the sheepfolds, and God chose him. He saw there someone who had love for Him. What a choice He made. The man who was following the sheep, nourishing his soul in thoughts of God and His love, and God says He took him from there to feed His people. Then in Psalm 89 He says, "I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him". O what a day it must have been for David when he was anointed, a shepherd boy who loved the brethren, and God says, I will anoint you, I will have you for myself, I will pour my holy oil upon you. He marked him out as known of Him. He passed over the other brothers in his family; He did not know them in that sense, but here He knows the man that had been among the sheepfolds.

Then in Psalm 132 we see how God was justified in His choice, because of David's love, not only for the brethren, but his love for the ark in a time when few troubled themselves about the ark. It says here, "Behold, we heard of it at Ephratah, we found it in the fields of the wood". The footnote would seem to suggest it was the time when the ark was at Kirjath-jearim, it was in a house where it was largely forgotten. If you spoke to Israelites about it, they would tell you where it was, but how few cared to visit it, may I say. When it was in that house, the Spirit of God says about it, "the time was long" (1 Sam 7: 2), it was almost forgotten. It is like the day we are in, when the Saviour who shed His blood for us, who suffered on the cross for your sins and mine, is publicly largely forgotten. How does He stand in your affections? Here is a man speaking about that with a great deal of sorrow, grieving that the Saviour who did so much for us finds very little in the way of response to His own heart of love. Is that what He would have to say about you? May His voice come into your heart today, All this have I done for you, what have you done for me? Well David said, I am going to do something about it. He says, "we heard of it at Ephratah". Would the friends that you have today be interested to hear about Christ? I speak to you young people, the persons you keep company with, are they interested to hear about a rejected Christ? Are they interested to hear about the way He spent Himself in suffering

love, and to hear of your feelings that there is very little response to that love? David said, Let us do something about it. He says, "I will not give sleep to mine eyes". Here is a committed young man, not only an interested man, but a committed man. He says, "I will not give sleep to mine eyes, slumber to mine eyelids". It became the consuming object in his life that Christ, as typified in the ark, may find a place where He could rest. O how God could say about David, I know him. What delight He had in anointing him! What delight He had in setting him on the throne!

Here he is typical of a young believer committing himself. You say, We have to sleep, we have to work, we have pressures, all kinds of things. But David says, "I will not give sleep to mine eyes". He says in a later psalm—

> If I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill ...
>
> let my tongue cleave to my palate; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Ps 137: 5, 6

He not only loved Christ but he loved to see Him enshrined in the affections of the saints. O what pleasure God had in a man who was interested when all others were careless; because that is the kind of day David was in. Persons were careless as to the Person of Christ, they were careless as to the place He had among His people, and David commits himself so that things should be changed. That committal involved sacrifice, "I will not give sleep to mine eyes"; it involves giving up some time from things you may think have priority. But David got his priorities right—

> I will not give sleep to mine eyes ...
>
> Until I find out a place for Jehovah, habitations for the Mighty One of Jacob.

Then he says, "Let us go into his habitations", let us see what is suited to the habitations of God. Think of David gathering up in his affections, and in his affliction too, gathering up through sacrifice that there may be a place where God could find His rest. Well, He found it. It was the height of Israel's

history, the days of David and Solomon, all because a man was interested and committed, in affection for Christ and His people, in a day when persons were careless. Well, if there was a man known in Israel it was David, as known of God.

When we come to Daniel the Jerusalem that David knew was broken down. Things had changed, and here in these circumstances is another young man, and what does he see? He seeks things broken. He was carried away in the captivity, but here he is a man who still had Jerusalem in his heart. Very few cared about it. You wonder why he knew so much about it. Well, it says earlier in the chapter, "I Daniel understood by the books". He was interested to read something of what Jeremiah had written, a very sober prophecy. For us that would be the Scriptures, and the ministry too. Jerusalem at that time was in ruins. He was in captivity, but think of him reading about the Jerusalem of the time of David and Solomon, and the Jerusalem of which Isaiah speaks. I think of Daniel reading those books, and saying, Things are not like that today. No, but he embraced the promises. He understood that the God who had promised was faithful to bring about His promises. What a place it was going to be, a place to dwell in. He is far away from it in the captivity, but he embraced the thought of it in his heart, and God gave him light about it. It is like the day we are in, dear brethren, a day when things are in a broken state. Let us understand through what the Spirit has been saying in this dispensation, and what He is saying today as to God's thoughts about Christ and the assembly. Let us have our heart opened to see that God's promises involve another day, although being worked out in the breakdown today.

It says at the close of this book, "Go thy way, Daniel", a very fine finish. As you read through the book of Daniel, the kings and empires change, as the hymn-writer says—

> Though empires should crumble, though nations should fall, (Hymn 27)

Daniel saw all that. The only thing that went through the book was Daniel in his knowledge of God. It says at the end, "go thy way until the end; and thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at

the end of the days", Dan 12: 13. What a fine word that is amidst all the confusion. It says that he understood by the books, but then too he was praying. God heard those prayers. Gabriel says, "At the beginning of thy supplications the word went forth, and I am come to declare it". Here is a man going into his closet and speaking to God. He might say, You see the troublous times that we are in, the small meetings, and the tests that have befallen us. That is how he might be speaking about the breakdown and feeling his part in it. God says, I will tell you about something else. This is not the end.

How many have thought it was the end, the breakdown is all around us, they thought everything was broken. Here is a man who went into his closet and prayed to God, and God says, That is not the end. He says, "I am now come forth to make thee skilful of understanding". So he goes his way and stands in his lot at the end of the days, a man who was known of God. He says, "Daniel ... thou art one greatly beloved". More than once in the book that is how he is addressed. Can God address you and me like that? Can He address us as persons who are greatly beloved, persons who have made themselves known to God? You can make yourself known to God through being interested in His word, through committing yourself in love for Christ and for His people, and through understanding by the books and your prayers. It is to such persons that God makes Himself known in the confidence of His love.

May He awaken and encourage our hearts, to be known in those circles, despised here below but known there, as Paul says, "as unknown, and well known" (2 Cor 6: 9); unknown in the circles of man's society, but well known to heaven, with a name placed there before God. "If any one love God", that is the spring of it all. It is the spring of our interest, the spring of our devotions, "If anyone love God, he is known of him". May it be from today that He knows all of us better, as more trustworthy, as committed to Christ and to His interests, until the day come when all will be changed and the promises and thoughts of His love will shine there in their own glory. Daniel had read about them, and God says, You go your way, you will share in them at the end of the days. Daniel rested in the knowledge that the God who had purposed would bring all to

pass, and He would bring him through to see it then in its fulness. In the meantime He gives us the Spirit. He gives us strengthening by His grace, that we may be maintained in the thoughts and purposes of His love until He calls us to be with Himself. May it be so, for His Name's sake.

MANCHESTER

16th March 1996

"JUST WITH GOD"

Job 9: 1-3, 30-35
1 Timothy 2: 4-6 (to "or all")
1 Peter 3: 18 (to "God")

These words of Job find an echo in the human heart until the ages of time: "how can man be just with God". Sin coming into the world has left man with the distance there is between God and men. The distance that Job felt, and men are made to feel that they can never meet, God removed. Job said no matter what he did how could he come and make peace with God. Men seem to have tried this from the outset. Even what we call the most primitive of tribes had some sense that they had got to make some approach, some peace, for some gain far outside their own reach. They made their idols, they made their sacrifices, but Job had a sense that there was nothing that he could do that would at all make a settlement between his soul and God. It is a blessed fact that he realised. That is what we have to come to, what God said here set his soul order, He cleansed him. Alas what deception has come into the race! Men think if they do the best they can it will make some peace with God. How could He look, how could He accept what man as held in the power of sin could ever offer. Job came to realise that and said there was nothing he could do. Whatever he could gather together, it would never make a way that he could be at rest with God. There is no way, my friend! There is no way that man of Adam's order could ever approach God. In God's holiness and His majesty, He must come in in judgment. We see that in Cain when he tried to draw near it brought in God's disapproval. So today as men would try one thing and another it remains as Job says, "Who can bring a clean man out of the unclean? Not one!", chap 14: 4. There is no way to draw near.

But in the gospel what God is proclaiming is that if man could not draw near, God has drawn near! The fact is that the approach must be from God's side. He must take it up, Job felt that there was nobody, he said "There is not an umpire between us, who should lay his hand upon us both". There was none of man's order who could lay his hand upon the

throne of God. There could be none that could rise up from that race and solve the question, "There is not an umpire between us, who should lay his hand upon us both". Job as seen in this book was a remarkably upright man, a man that was very much above the mortal characteristics of men; his uprightness and honesty. But he was honest in this, there was not anything that man could provide would ever reach and make a settlement of the distance that existed between God and men. It says that he longed for it! Would that men be at the glad tidings today were longing for someone to be able to bring them near to God. It says that in the last scripture that Christ has brought us to God. The only One who can draw near. God has drawn near in Him. It tells us in the scripture that He has drawn near in the "man Christ Jesus". A remarkable statement that, He has not drawn near in an angel, that would hardly settle the question, but it says, "the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus". Remarkable that Job should have these feelings to draw near to God and God has the feelings to have the creature. It is the "Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved". The great matter of sin and sins could be resolved only from God's side, and He has done it in the "man Christ Jesus", the anointed Man. The Man of another order, the "man Christ Jesus". That is a Man, a mediator thus being able to meet and resolve the issue that had been raised. The mediator must be one who is greater than the problem and here He is, "the man Christ Jesus". A man, but a different kind of man. Not a man who lived here at a distance from God, but a man whom God had anointed. He was here, He came from God, the hymn says—

> From heav'n the Saviour came,
> Jesus, His precious name, (Hymn 245)

He came from God, not of man's order. It is God coming out in answer to the feelings of Job, but too coming in from His own side with the feelings of His heart who would have all men to be saved. He has provided a means, He has provided a Man, a Man who has satisfied Him about what has come into the race, "the man Christ Jesus", on whom when He was here the heavens were opened. A Man who satisfied God about what

had come into the race, what it must have been in God's sight when Jesus was here, "the man Christ Jesus". It says in earlier times just as Job had looked for a man, so God looked for a man and said there was no man, Ezek 22: 30! He wondered that there was no man! In the whole race from Adam right down there was no man. The "man Christ Jesus" has come in from God's side, He has come in on God's behalf. He has come in on man's behalf, but first of all He has come in on God's behalf. Because if God was not satisfied with what has come into the race, there could be no hope for humanity, Christ came in from God's side, He came in on God's behalf, "the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus". There is One there, a Man, but a different Man upon whom God's eye could rest with perfect complacency. In the circumstances in which men lived, He lived in the physical environment that men live in, and the circumstances of life, but there He is, God's Man.

Pilate found it when he brought Him out to the Jews he said, "Behold the man!", John 19: 6. Israel will yet see that there is only one Man! In the glad tidings God is proclaiming that there is one Man, "the man Christ Jesus". No liabilities that lie upon the race lay upon Him. He was tempted by Satan and then left for a season (Luke 4: 13), He is the man that that Ethiopian eunuch said who is He, Acts 8: 34. When he had read that chapter in Isaiah 53, he says who is this man? He could not fit into any other society that he knew, the Man was so different. The Man who "when suffering, threatened not" (1 Pet 2: 23), the Man who glorified God in the circumstances of life through which men were passing. The Man that God is setting forth. It is the Man that God is saying He has found His infinite pleasure in, that He has made Him the Mediator, He is that, "the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus". Precious words these, He gave "himself a ransom for all". There it is, the core of the gospel, He "gave himself". He said in the gospels that they had no authority over Him unless it was given from above, John 19: 11. There He is! Could He not have called on all that power, all those legions of angels He spoke about, but there He is; He "gave himself a ransom for

all". God's claims, God's holiness, God's majesty had to be met and there it was met in the "man Christ Jesus".

All that had come into the race, the power of sin, had been arrested in the incoming of Jesus. What had activated and the power against every other man was negated there, "the man Christ Jesus". Peter says about Him, "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth", 1 Pet 2: 22. The power of sin was broken there. It says He "gave himself a ransom for all"; so perfect, so precious in God's sight, it is implied He had no need Himself. It involved that He Himself was spotless, holy, precious Lamb of God that He was able to meet God about what had come into the race. And that goes forth in the glad tidings tonight that God's holy claims have been met in the sufferings and death of Jesus as to what has come into the race. The "man Christ Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, so if the whole world came to God tonight and repented, the blood of Jesus would be enough for everyone.

> Thousands have fled to His spear-pierced side;
> Welcome they all have been, none are denied
>
> (Hymn 169)

God has been satisfied in the Mediator. That is the great fundamental matter that God has been satisfied with what the Mediator has done. Men say why does not God come in in these cruelties of men, why does God not intervene? At the moment, God is looking upon men in mercy because of the delight He has found in Jesus, "the man Christ Jesus". God's answer to that movement of Jesus is that He has glorified Him. God raised Him up, as Peter said in that beautiful preaching God has "glorified his servant Jesus", Acts 3: 13. That shows God's perfect satisfaction in the Mediator, He has glorified Him. That is a wonderful thing, that a man has been glorified. A man who was here in the circumstances of life has been glorified. He is alone in that. Others will be brought into the glory, but He is alone in having been glorified in that way on account of His moral excellence and beauties.

Peter says again about Him that it was not possible that He should be held by the power of death, Acts 2: 24. The

Person who was there in His intrinsic worth death could not rend Him, death could not hold Him, death who could hold every other man, there He is, "the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all". That was for God! The judgment has been stayed, He paid the price; so the ransom means that the debt and penalty that lay upon the race Christ has paid the price for the race, He "gave himself a ransom for all". O what a day it must have been for heaven! Think of all the power of sin that had reigned from Adam right down, the debt that had to be paid, what a debt had accrued, He "gave himself a ransom for all". What that price was! Job said he could not meet it, "None can by any means redeem his brother", (Ps 49: 7), but here is One who gave Himself "a ransom for all". O how it would cause you to tarry on the worthiness of Jesus! There was no other that could be there at the cross, He gave Himself "a ransom for all". What depths were tasted, what a price was paid, not only that He was there on the cross, but He bore the judgment of God, He bore it in His body. O the measure of what He felt, the measure of what was laid upon Him, it says, "Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all", Isa 53: 6. What rested there upon Christ, what God laid upon Him was what was due to the sinner, blessed be His name, God has been satisfied in that work. He was on the cross, when His blood was shed, when He died, when He lay in the grave, it is all part of the work of Jesus when He was set forth as a mediator between God and men; God "has glorified his servant Jesus". The gospel goes forth to tell you, to tell all humanity that God is satisfied with the Mediator. The gospel goes forth that you, a sinner like Job, you who indeed could do nothing like Job, may come and be satisfied with the Mediator that God has provided.

When all the others rise up, there will be a man who rises up on this earth to try and draw man away, that draws men after himself to do homage to him. It speaks of men doing homage to the beast (Rev 13: 4), men rising up with great power, but God's judgment will lie upon them. Here is a man proclaimed in the gospel that in God's heart is infinitely loved, and He proclaims the glad tidings today that you may come to have confidence, that you may rest your case upon the

Mediator that God has provided; "the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus". He has come, it is not an angel who has done it, it is a Man! It is a Man who has gone into the position, a Man who fills the office, "the man Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all". That is to endear Him to you as well. It has endeared Him to God, has it endeared Him to you? Some were there, it said "by the cross of Jesus", some stood there, they were endeared to a Man who was there upon the cross, it says "by the cross of Jesus stood", these three women, John 19: 25. In all that the Lord was doing He endeared Himself to them. That is what Peter would bring home to us, he says "for Christ indeed has once suffered", 1 Pet 3: 18. Christ indeed once suffered for sins, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God". There is no other way! Good works, whatever the form they may take, whatever way they may try and prepare themselves, there is no other way, here is the Man, Christ who has once suffered for sins "the just for the unjust". That is to endear Him to you; your sins! He did it, He did it from God's side, He met what had come into the race in God's eye, but in the gospel, it is preached, faith, and we have to come to believe He has met your sins. The sins for every person! The great sacrifice we can hardly compass, but it met God's eye for what had come into the race, but here Peter is saying, "Christ indeed has once suffered for sins", that is personal, it is your sins, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God". He went that way, He bore all that judgment of God on the cross, He went that way that He may endear Himself to you. God has His confidence in the Mediator, and the gospel is proclaimed tonight that you may have your trust, you may have your confidence, you may rest your case in the hands of Jesus; He has "once suffered for sins". Not only suffered for sin and removed it from God's eye, but the details, it required a personal transaction that you could say that not only what was for God's eye, what had come into the race, but He met in His body, He met in Himself in those sufferings, He "suffered for sins". It must be yours; it was never His own, He "suffered for sins". What sufferings they were, those women around the cross saw that, they saw a holy, perfect, just Man, "the just for the unjust". He stands alone, "the just". It speaks of Him too,

"the just one" (Acts 22: 14), a Man of another order! What confidence it brings into the human heart that such a One suffered for my sins. The hymn says—

> My sins—O the bliss of this glorious thought—
> My sins—not in part, but the whole—
> Were borne on the cross, and are gone evermore,
> Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!'
>
> (Hymn 238)

The original hymn was written by someone who came to trust in the Mediator; 'not in part', and 'are gone evermore' for those who have put their faith and trust in the Mediator that God has provided. What glad tidings is God proclaiming. Job felt that there was no one, but in the gospel God is proclaiming His Man, the Mediator that He has set forth, the One that He has established, there is a meeting place where the sinner can come to God, it says, "that he might bring us to God". It is a very personal touch, He suffered for your sins and removed them, and He wants to take you by the hand to bring you to God. Is there any other way? Is there any other man who could bring you in? No! No other man has been accepted of God and may that same Man be accepted by all here tonight, the One whom God is setting "forth a mercy-seat through faith in his blood", Rom 3: 25. And it says here in Peter that "he might bring us to God". It is a very personal experience, a very necessary experience that He might bring you to God. Not only that He suffered for your sins, that is the only way, but He brings you to God, He brings you to have peace. The peace that Job was longing for! The peace in a sense that all claims and liabilities have been met to God's eternal satisfaction and they have been met for your conscience, and they too have been met for your heart.

The work of Christ is to ease the conscience, for it is what every man has, it must have been working in Job, it says "how can man be just with God", his conscience was active. But here God will show how Jesus suffered for sins to settle your conscience, and it says, "to bring us to God". It is bringing in the peace; it is bringing in a sense of blessing so that normal relationships are now resumed. A very fine thing!

When normal relationships have been disturbed and God saw that the distance was removed and normal relationships are brought in between God and men. He is with God; it is not a matter of God not accepting Him. And the theme of the glad tidings is that you may see that there is nothing in you, there is nothing in man, but there is everything by putting your faith and trust in the Mediator that God has provided; He has "suffered for sins". Blessed be His name! It never will need to be repeated because of God's delight in the work of Christ and for your soul in faith it is done once and for all. Peace with God, peace established because all the distance has been removed and He has brought us to God. What man could never aspire to; God has made a Mediator and will bring us in. What a reception! What a reception as Christ brings us to God what a reception is found. God delights to bless those who put their faith and trust in Him, turning away from their own self-righteousness, come to see their own insufficiencies and put their faith and trust in the "man Christ Jesus". It remains there today, the power and virtue is there for the eye of faith; put your trust in Him. The day is coming when God will take up matters on a different basis but tonight, He is waiting on a soul that would come and put their faith in Jesus, it says "that he might bring us to God".

May it be the experience of those who hear the glad tidings tonight that they come and are brought to God, to know the peace, to know the joy, to know the blessing of His house.

May He bless the word.

EDINBURGH

21st September 1996

This preaching has been included from a recording; the script has been edited but not by our brother.

REVIVAL

John 21: 1, 5-7 (to "Lord"), 9-12 (to "dine")
1 Kings 19: 4-9
Song of Songs 5: 2-7
Genesis 45: 26-28; 46: 1, 2

I look for the Lord's help to say a little from these scriptures as to revival. There is no Christian but who has at some time in their histories felt the need of being revived. Perhaps it would be true of some of us in this room today. The idea of revival is that you should be restored to your true place, without any encumbrance, and functioning normally in relation to the things of God. The Lord has that in mind for every believer, that we should be functioning normally. He is going to revive Israel in the day to come—that nation which today is scattered, who have been so cruel—to Christ. What a day it is going to be when God revives them! Paul, speaking about it, says, "For if their casting away be the world's reconciliation, what their reception but life from among the dead?" Rom 11: 15. It is a wonderful feature of the work of God, that it is capable of being revived. You cannot revive the flesh because the flesh is going on to death: there is no hope for the flesh. But the work of God has that very fine feature about it that it is capable of being revived. Maybe the Lord would appeal to us for a few moments to revive the work of God in us.

You may have been discouraged, with "hands that hang down, and failing knees", Heb 12: 12. He would appeal to us in the word that we may not be turned aside, but that we may rather be encouraged. It says again as to Israel, "... I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart", Hos 2: 14. They had become engaged in things that were Egyptian, such as would spoil true Christian character, but what He says to Israel He would say to some of us today, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak to her heart ... and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth", v 15. As you look at some believers today, perhaps you can hardly see the work of God; yet the Lord has that wonderful capability to speak to the heart, to revive His work. How

beautiful that must be to God, to hear that singing, that fresh expression of loyalty and love and appreciation of the Saviour and all His grace, that brought them out of Egypt through the blood. How precious Israel was in those days and how precious you are, my friend, to Christ, as you come to see that He died for your sins, and shed His blood on the cross. He died to meet your every liability that shut you out from the presence of God. How precious to heaven those tears of repentance, and of joy in the Saviour's love. Maybe now they are not so fresh as they should be! I would have to say that is true, perhaps, of many of us.

But, if it is, the Lord would speak to our hearts, and here in John 21, the Lord does that. It says "Jesus manifested himself again ... And he manifested himself thus". John goes to great pains to show the detail of the grace of Christ as flowing through the dispensation to revive and bring persons back into their true place, to function normally. It says, "the third time", v 14. Was twice not enough? Well, maybe it should have been, but I believe the third time is to impress upon us how the Lord is taking care of His own through the dispensation. He knows our weaknesses, and the thoughts that flood into our minds as the pressure of circumstances and disappointments come. He knows, so it says, "This is already the third time". Oh! how He must have felt it that persons upon whom He had expended so much should go back to their fishing. Had He not called them away from it? In their zeal and loyalty, they left all and followed Him. Here now, they have gone back. How like many of us, we have gone back, but the Lord does not leave them. "And he manifested himself thus". John is impressed with the detail of it: they had gone away, but He stood on the shore. He is on sure ground. We may be in circumstances where things are unstable, but He does not go into the sea with them. They were on an expedition in which He could not go with them, but He stands on the shore, and as the morning dawns, you can visualise these weary, wet fishermen, and Jesus standing there. What is His word? Where have you been? No! "Come and dine". How beautiful! What an appeal it had to John! What an appeal it had to Peter, the grace of Christ when they had turned their

backs, shining upon them in all its freshness and lustre and beauty: "Come and dine". How graciously the Lord would come and bring us into conditions where He would have us to be functioning normally. Their expedition was fruitless. He says, While you have been doing that, I have been doing something else. I saw how wet and how weary you were, and I made a fire of coals. I have fish ready when you had none. Oh, the grace of Christ that would cause our hearts to be revived in this weary day, in this time when we have been discouraged, He has everything in hand to bring us back into normal circumstances!

As I have said, this is a picture, I think, of what is flowing through the dispensation, the grace of Christ to revive us, to call us back to normal circumstances. John says, "It is the Lord". Who else could it have been? There are those affections undivided now, no longer pulled one way and another. "It is the Lord". Oh! I am sure that every believer in this room has known something of it. Mr Darby says, from experience no doubt—

> Still sweet 'tis to discover,
> If clouds have dimmed my sight,
> When passed, eternal Lover,
> Towards me, as e'er, Thou'rt bright. (Hymn 51)

That is Jesus here, His attitude still the same, His love for them unchanged, His grace flowing in all its fulness, "Come and dine". Well, I suggest that this illustrates the Lord's patient, gracious service in this dispensation, to allure us to where He is on solid ground, to taste some of His own reserves and resources. When they were unable to do anything, He had provided something at cost to Himself, and He says, "Come and dine": everything was prepared.

Well, with Elijah, things had not turned out the way he expected. He lost for a moment the sense that the continuation of the testimony and the dispensation depended on Christ and not on him. He had a very great place in God's ways with His people and things did not turn out the way he expected. Have you ever known that? Alas, it is the feeling of many today, that things have not turned out the way they

expected. Elijah was saying, as many say, that there is no longer a collective position there is breakdown all around, what can we do? And Elijah says, it is far better that he should die. Think of the man that he was, and how greatly he was used of God, and here he is thinking, it is far better that he should just go away and leave things as they are. God raises the question with him twice "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Why are you in those circumstances? Are any here like that today, in circumstances surrounded by discouragement, feeling that everything is gone· all is broken? God says, Why are you here, Elijah? Why are you in those circumstances?

God would not only say that, but He provides for His servant. When he is asleep, there is something provided for him: there is food and there is water. Oh! what grace there is to revive the heart and he "went in the strength of that food forty day and forty nights". What a God he was having to do with! What a God we have to do with for the carrying through of the testimony, my friend! Christ has charged Himself to see it through and to see those who have faith in Him through to the end at the true level of the dispensation: "Arise, shine! for thy light is come", Isa 60: 1. Beautiful word that, to all our hearts today! What a word it would be to Elijah! He said, No, it is passed. God says, It is come: here it is. If he was prepared to go out, there was another who was coming in. God said, I have seven thousand. What resources heaven has! Oh, to be in touch with them! So God would give His servant food that he might come into touch with the wonderful resources of heaven. It says, "And he ate and drank, and lay down again". The first touch was not enough: God comes back again. There it is, fresh supplies, and He wakes up. Maybe there was some revival the first time. Perhaps he said, Well, it is maybe not as bad as I thought, but again overpowered, he went back to sleep, and there is the angel again with fresh supplies of divine grace. "And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights"—beyond what was normal. It shows how far away he had been, but oh the grace of Christ to give power to cover the distance as he went in the strength of that food to Horeb the mount of God! He comes to the place of divine resources. Oh what he saw and

heard there! God would bring you into an area where He has provided everything. Horeb speaks of that, the mount of God. Abraham found it. It says, "on the mount of Jehovah will be provided", Gen 22: 14. May we come to know the power there is to carry the testimony in persons through to the end, in vitality. Well, God reveals that to His servant.

As we speak of the one in the Song of Songs, there is something different. She is revived too, thank God. It says that she was asleep. I would speak of her as an indifferent believer, who is shunning the reproach. She is a bit like a Laodicean in some ways. Maybe you have been a bit indifferent and careless as to the things of Christ and you have just settled in your own circumstances. It says about her that she had put off her tunic, retired to her bed. She had become lazy as to the needs of the testimony. And yet the Lord addresses her, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, mine undefiled". How beautiful to think that Christ has not changed His thoughts about you or for you. Maybe you no longer think of yourself in that way. But the Lord's greeting is still the same: "my sister, my love, my dove, mine undefiled". Was she not defiled? Had she not allowed the circumstances abroad to affect her affections? Yet He has the right and He uses it to greet her as His undefiled because He has in mind to restore her to that. I only point out in this passage that the way back may involve deep exercise. It did for her. We have spoken of the ones in John 21: everything was there and the way back was very easy. But if we become indifferent to the appeals of divine love the way back will involve deep exercise and sorrow. It did for her. She came to realise that she was in a false position. The word of God may come to you like that, to alert you to the fact that you are in a false position. The Lord is appealing. He was outside. He would be saying, "Open to me". She, obviously, was not in the position that He was in. Think of how appealingly He speaks, "For my head is filled with dew, My locks with the drops of the night". That is the Lord outside. He has been shut out publicly. They may erect great churches; they may have fine music. Where is Christ? He has been shut out.

For my head is filled with dew
My locks with the drops of the night

The Lord not able to get in, no place for Him. As He puts in His hand by the hole of the door, there is a little way of entrance. And what does He leave there? I think He leaves on that door a fresh touch of His suffering love. I think that would be implied in the liquid myrrh which He left on the lock and on the handles. He left an appeal of His love in a fresh way. The love of Christ for her had perhaps become historical. She would know His love and she could speak of it, perhaps, as something she knew in the past. But for Him it was ever present, and in the liquid myrrh He leaves an impression on the handles and the lock of His present love for her and the cost it was to Him.

As I have said, it involved exercise for her. It says she rose up: there is something stirred in her soul of affection for Him, but where was He? She had got so far away that she did not know where to find Him. Maybe she had not been at the meeting for a number of weeks. It would bear the application that she had missed the Supper perhaps for a few weeks and she did not know where to find Him. Where is He going to be found? Well, she rises, and it says, the watchmen found her. The watchmen are not the shepherds. The watchmen are persons who maintain the principles and they may, because of your condition and your appearance, seem harsh at times: that is what she finds. "They smote me, they wounded me". Why was that? Had she been under His shadow, the watchmen would not have found her. The watchmen were looking for enemies. They were looking to guard the city and all that was inside it, but there she is. She could not find Him and the watchmen evil-treated her. They did more perhaps than they should, but she should never have been there. Maybe you feel and many others have felt and thought the brethren had been very hard, that what persons were saying was not gracious, but you should never be in the position for the watchmen to find you. You should keep under the shelter, under the influence of His love—"my dove, mine undefiled".

These things are there to bring us back: they are all on the way, but she soon finds Him. She goes through the exercises. She may criticise the brethren for being a bit hard to begin with, but she finds in it all the reality of the love of Christ to bring her back. Every time she looked at her hands, she would see what she had gathered from the lock and the handles of the door, the fresh touches of His suffering love, to bring her back on to true ground where she can speak of her beloved, not in a historical way, but as "white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand", v 10. She is brought back into a new position. She is revived to function normally, to be in her true place among the brethren, extolling her beloved in all His beauties. Revival has that in mind. May it be, beloved brother or sister, that you find grace to go through the exercises, to find Him in a way that you have never known Him before. She says she would hold Him and she would not let Him go. That was the effect of the experience, that she would never let Him go. So there she is, she is found there extolling Him, revived in her affections, with a fresh view of His grace and of His love.

I refer to Jacob only as another discouraged believer. So often God revived Jacob, who in pursuit of his own things takes a long time to come into the fulness of what God had in mind for him, and here he is, a man who was living at the close of his life and very, very discouraged. He thought that what God had promised to Abraham and to Isaac was not going to work out. God had promised great things to Abraham and to Isaac, and to Jacob as well, and he says, Where are they? He says, Here I am and my soul is needing food. His family was needing food. And all the time it was there at hand. The word comes into those circumstances where he is that Joseph is still alive. It says, "And his heart fainted, for he did not believe them". He was discouraged as looking at the brethren. Maybe they say wonderful things, and they may be in the gain of them, but you maybe look at the shortcomings of the saints. That is what Jacob—and not without good ground—saw, the shortcomings of the brethren. It says his heart fainted, for he did not believe them. And the word comes again "And they spoke to him all the words of Joseph ... And he saw the

waggons that Joseph had sent to carry him". The Lord has not just left it to the brethren to revive you: Joseph sent the waggons, and it says, "And he saw the waggons that Joseph had sent to carry him. And the spirit of Jacob their father revived". It would be a touch by the Spirit of what comes directly from Christ to the believer that is unquestionable. What the brethren say may seem to you questionable at times. I do not want to discredit them for one moment, but maybe in your view, what they say is not just the fulness of things, to you, at least. But it says, when he saw the waggons, "the spirit of Jacob their father revived". It had come directly from Joseph, in type the Man in the glory. The waggons would allude to the Spirit. They would allude to spiritual ministry too, from Christ, flowing through the dispensation that can revive you. I would encourage you, my friend, to read spiritual ministry. There is nothing more reviving than to read some of the ministry that the Lord has given. It has come as a waggon, to transport you from where you are to where He is. There has been a line of spiritual ministry for a long period of time that is available to revive you. I would encourage you to read it, to make time for it. Maybe you do not understand it. Read it anyway! The waggons would mean that you will come to understand it. There is power in the waggons to transport, to banish doubts and banish fears, to bring you into an area where Joseph is still alive.

Oh, think of Jacob! He says, What, still alive, all those years, and I have been out of touch! And what had happened in those years? It had been the years of Joseph's glory in Egypt, and he had missed it. How sad! How sad for a believer to be in circumstances of poverty when all the time there has been flowing ministry of the glory of Christ exalted, the Father having loved the Son and given all things to be in His hand. There He is: He was the Saviour of the world, Sustainer of life, and the Revealer of secrets; and there is Jacob, a poor believer, far, far from it. Well, Joseph is still alive. All that has come into the course of the testimony and all that has come into it in our lives has not altered His position. He says, "I will go and see him before I die". But he did not go to die, he went to live

the best part of his life under—in type—the influence of Christ exalted.

So "Israel took his journey". I would appeal to everyone of us to take our journey. Joseph is still alive. Commit yourself to these waggons, to the line of spiritual ministry that has come into the dispensation. As soon as he took his journey, God spoke to him, "and he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac". He began to see that the promises were secured in Christ in glory: "For whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen, for glory to God by us", 2 Cor 1: 20. That is what Jacob came to see, that all the promises were centred in Joseph exalted, Christ glorified, and they are all true for the believer in Him, the Yea and the Amen. What promises He has made for us! One of them is, "I am coming to you". What a promise! We look for it tomorrow, but do not put it off: look for it tonight! He is ready to come at any time. Asaph found that when he went into the sanctuary, God was ready to give him a touch of what was inside. Well, He says, "I am coming to you". He says too, 'I am coming for you'. Wonderful promises to sustain the believer in revived affection until the time when He comes and the need for revival will be for ever over. The need for reviving is because of these bodies and the conditions of limitation that we are in, that is Jacob but now he is called Israel, the royal, princely man, no longer the man of disappointments and the man who was capable of deceiving, but there he is a prince, living under the influence of Christ exalted.

May it be the portion of all our hearts, to come into the light, and the joy of the place that Christ fills, not only for God's glory and praise, but for our satisfaction and glory too! May it be so for His Name's sake!

WITNEY

28th September 1996

FOOD

Exodus 12: 1-11; 16: 13-18
Joshua 1: 10, 11; 5: 10-12

RT I think the Lord would graciously give us some sense of what is typified in the food referred to in these passages, so that we may be strengthened to overcome in the exercises and practical matters that we have to face. In Exodus 12, they have the passover in view of leaving Egypt, and in chapter 16 they have the manna in view of being sustained in the wilderness; and then in Joshua they have the victuals in view of passing over into the land, and in Gilgal they have a fresh touch of the old corn of the land in view of living in the land. We may be helped to apply these experiences to the practical exercises of our lives and find the Lord and His grace sufficient for all that we each have to face. The food in each case is enough to sustain the people superior to the circumstances. The food in Exodus 12 gives us to see the lengths to which Christ has suffered on our account that we may not be engulfed and ensnared in the world's system. The passover was to be celebrated each year, whether it was the wilderness or the land; it was something that was to be ever in their minds, that the Lord's love and His divine grace had delivered them from Egypt. He has delivered us out of the present evil world (Gal 1: 4); He died on that account. As we think of Him like this, it would help us to see what love He has shown us. A world that is going on to judgment but the Lord in His grace and His love has served us to deliver us from it. I think that would be food for our souls to maintain us in a proper judgment of all that would ensnare and hold us in bondage.

LMcF So the household is prominent in these scriptures—household responsibility. Develop that for us.

RT Many of us have grown up in this area of things, where we are protected from the world and its evil. But then there is the practice and the teaching in the household that would give us strength as we grow up to have a judgment of the world as nurtured in the love of Jesus, who would have us to be free from

it in appreciation of the love that went to this length to keep us apart from it.

JAP You spoke in your opening prayer of the Spirit's service to us, individually and then collectively. Are both services seen here? The assembly is in view but my house is in view too. Would you say something about that?

RT I think that is a very fine thing to count on. I was impressed with it as we sang the hymn, that the Spirit has peculiar liberty in the circumstances of the Christian household, and as nurtured in that area of things the Spirit protects us. But then I think we are nourished too in the local assembly; the Spirit has greater liberty in the assembly than He has in the households and with us individually. The exercise would be that we are nourished to be able to stand against the influences of the world, through an appreciation of the love of Christ. The Spirit would make that very fresh and real to us individually and collectively. How near the Lord Jesus has come, even into circumstances where He would die for us. The love behind His stoop into manhood that led Him to go this way is to endear Him to us to build up strength in us as feeding on Him. What contradiction from sinners He endured! As contemplating Him it gives us strength to find our way through the influences that are all around us that would in many ways appeal to us, too.

CFD So while the angel would see the blood, the household would be protected by it. Do you think that the blood on the door-posts and the lintel would be obvious and visible to all the members of the house, so that as they came in and went out everything would have to pass the death of Christ? You cannot but feel that the enemy would seek to invade our houses in one way or another through its occupants; therefore the constant reminder of the blood on the door-posts.

RT It was their salvation that that blood was there. So as you say each occupant would see it being done and would see that faith in that blood saved them from the judgment. But it is faith in the blood of that lamb that was there four days in the house, speaking of the gracious movements of Jesus in His manhood here. It was the blood of that One that preserved

them from the judgment that was coming on Egypt—and how severe the judgment was!

CFD Each member appropriating the lamb according to the measure of his eating would show that even by the youngest of the family something should be imbibed and put into their souls as to what this all means. The death of Christ is being brought forward and presented to separate them from everything on the outside. That is where we are in danger, do you think, that things on the outside in some way or another might snare us?

RT Yes. I thought we should keep the individual side very much before us. There is the household, which protects us, but each individual had to eat this for themselves. It is something we all have to face. We are protected in the household and in the local company too, but there are exercises that come into our lives that we each have to face ourselves, by ourselves. We have help from others undoubtedly, but the eating, I thought, would give us to be strong enough in ourselves that the influences of the world do not overwhelm us. And they are very real today in many, many ways, not only in what is abroad—we would all have a judgment of the gross evil and immorality that is in the world—but there are the influences of the world that would bring us into bondage and hinder us from moving forward into the liberty that God has in mind for His people. I thought the contemplation of the sufferings and death of Christ would help us as to a true judgment, that the whole world in all its aspects lies under judgment.

ASH I was thinking as to the neighbour—"and his neighbour next to him"—whether that would bring about unity? We would all be united as one as assembly persons.

RT That is a good suggestion because the people here were unified as never before. So we find that, if we all have the same judgment about the world, its attempts to ensnare us and hold us from moving into the great thoughts of God, we can help one another, to stand against the world. So while we have to feed individually, we can be feeding together, and that would be what we are seeking to do now, to feed together and encourage one another to feed increasingly on this precious food that would give us power to move forward.

LDP It says in Matthew 26 that as they were eating Jesus gave them the Supper. How does that bear on us today?

RT I think there is a very direct connection with this. Matthew emphasises the need for eating. It is not light exactly, although light lies behind it, but eating involves appropriating. We do not get the good of the meetings by saying it is a good meeting, and admiring the truth and reading it, but as you say, Matthew emphasises the eating. That means that something comes into us and makes us strong constitutionally in view of the exercises and the pressures that are presented to us.

JAP The lamb reminds you of the will broken. That is the hard thing in our households, is it not? It is the will of another Man, the will of the Lord Jesus to come into my house.

RT John the baptist had a very strong impression of Jesus like this, did he not? How he appreciated and pointed Him out as "the Lamb of God". So here it is your lamb. You read the Scriptures, especially the gospels, and you get some attractive impression of Jesus, how He conducted Himself in the midst of the Pharisees and these doctors of the law. You begin to take that to yourself. It is your lamb, and you see how that Man died to free me from all the influences that are around that would hinder us entering into the thoughts of divine love tor us.

LMcF So verse 11 says, "And thus shall ye eat it: your loins shall be girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste; it is Jehovah's passover". The thought of movement is in mind here; they are not settling down, they are on the move and they are to eat it in haste. How do we apply that?

RT You can tell us.

LMcF This is an urgent matter and we need to come to that. The blood distinguishes our households from the world when we are moving out of the world typically, do you think?

RT Yes. It says of John, "Looking at Jesus as he walked," John 1: 36. It was a sacrificial walk, the life of Jesus here, on the cross to free us from the system of bondage and the judgment under which the world lies. So as we look at the Man

of the gospels, we see the beauties and moral perfections of the details of His life, but that life had to be laid down to free us from the world. The world had no claim upon Him; He walked through it in perfect communion with His God and Father. He says, "the ruler of the world comes, and in me he has nothing" (John 14: 30), but He laid down that life to make a way out for us. The sense of that coming into our souls exposes the world to us but helps us to be in spirit, while we are still in it, free from its influences.

KNP What do you say about it being roast with fire?

RT I think it is the cross. It says, "Ye shall eat none of it raw, nor boiled". He did not only suffer but He died and He was forsaken. The roasting would imply that the Man of the Gospels was forsaken on our account to help us to get clear of the world. We could never get clear of the world without feeding on the Christ who died.

KNP They would see that too, would they not? I was thinking of contemplation of the Lord on the cross, something that is good for our contemplation; as the lamb was roasting they would be watching.

RT That is a great test, is it not? The One whom I follow has gone this way and if the world crucified my Saviour, can I find my life and my associations of life in that world? That is impossible as feeding on Him like this. So Paul brings the cross into Corinth. I think this passage would link with Corinthians. There they were, puffed up, so Paul brings in the cross. I think he brings in the lamb roast with fire to help them to be clear of the worldly influences coming into the assembly. They were having their parties and links that were out of keeping with a crucified Christ. He says in that epistle too that "our passover, Christ, has been sacrificed" 1 Cor 5: 7. It would connect with this passage in applying it to the Christian's life, that the cross and the teaching of it helps us to grow not only in our judgment of the world but to grow in assembly circumstances.

CFD I think bringing in the thought of the abandonment, the forsaking, helps us here. It shows the full extent of the fire, does it not? It is nothing mitigated. It is not like being boiled,

but it is the full effect of the fire in which typically the Lord absorbed the whole matter including the forsaking. I think that helps, it helps me as you refer to that, to see the extent to which the Lord went. I think the appropriation of that would be salvation to us.

RT Yes, I think it would help us to maintain our judgment, that He had to go that far and bear that judgment that we may escape the judgment that is pending on the world. We have often remarked that it was a well-known Jesus who was forsaken on our account. And so it would endear Him to us that He has gone that length in His love to free us from the bondage that the world would hold us in. Because here they were held in slavery. They were not able to worship God, because they were held in bondage to the world. Now Christ died to break that bondage that we may be free to enter into the great realm of divine love and blessing.

ASH I was looking at that earlier: "Ye shall eat none of it raw, nor boiled at all with water"; that side was eliminated and as you remarked the fire was direct on the lamb.

RT Well, going along with it, there is unleavened bread. He alone was forsaken on our account, but then, as we appreciate that, there is this unleavened bread that accompanies it. That means for us that we seek to be true. And that was what Paul was labouring at in Corinth that they might be true to the cross, they might accept and follow the crucified One to come into the liberty of assembly circumstances and assembly life.

JAP The attack of the devil has been on the home; these marvellous inventions of men—these videos, internet, computers and television and so forth—the whole world can be piped into your home. You do not have to go out and get anything, it can just be piped right in. And think of our dear children and grand-children in worldly homes: they are exposed to that kind of thing. What would you say? How should that be met?

RT I think, as you say, it is very insidious. We are still in the world and part of it and we have to find our way through it, but we will only rightly do that as we see that it lies under

judgment and Christ had to die, in this world, in order that we may not be condemned along with it. Paul was anxious to get the Corinthians to have a right judgment. I think this is what the eating would help us to do, strengthen us to have a judgment that the world lies in the wicked one. Its influences as you say, come very near to us. He died here. So we should judge things in the light of the cross.

CFD So if the Lord should tarry and we come up to the Supper tomorrow, I think what you have raised is very real, that is, our approach would be a real challenge. We are challenged as to whether we are true to Him. Are we true to the principles of the Lord's supper? I think that would come home to us afresh. And if we are, it would liberate us in relation to the service of God that lies beyond, would it not?

RT I am sure of that. It would strengthen us. Paul writes, Let a man examine himself. I think the passover enters into that. Then Paul speaks about the cross, "through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world", Gal 6: 14. The cross of Jesus and His being forsaken helps us to have a judgment and compare things. Is it in keeping with the cross? So the Supper has a great regulating effect, that we are truly announcing His death. That would be as we come together, but it would also be in our lives, leading up to the Supper. The unleavened bread keeps us in accord with the sufferings. It says it was to be the beginning of the year for them. It was celebrated in the wilderness and in the land and you can see, in the history of the people of old, that when the passover was well kept there was a healthy condition among them. There was a long period of time when it was forgotten and the people fell into very bad habits. But you can see the reviving of the passover meant the reviving of spiritual life among the Israelites. So it would be for us, the maintenance of it would keep us in spiritual life. These are very real exercises we have to face in our lives and we have to carry it with us that Christ died for us to deliver us out of the present evil world. Then we come into the wilderness in chapter 16, and we find that there is something else; there is a different kind of food that maintains them. I think the passover gives us a judgment, then it brings us into circumstances where they did not have the leeks and

the garlic of Egypt. We say sometimes, What have we got? If the cross has divided and separated us from these things that you speak of, the radio and television, what have we got? We are apt to murmur and complain. That is what the people were doing here. God says, I will give you something else. And what He gave them brought them through the wilderness for forty years. I think it is an appreciation of Christ now that would strengthen us for the journey day by day. Through our lives in the wilderness circumstances we have what would make us content and appreciative of the grace that has come so near to us.

GA I was thinking of the gospels, Matthew and Mark and the others, how the Lord brought the crowds together, made them sit down and fed them with a few loaves and the fishes and they went away satisfied. It says it was as the hoarfrost on the ground; they each ate according to their measure and went away satisfied. The Lord can do these things, would you say?

RT That is what we are looking for this morning, something that would satisfy us. As you say, the Lord, in His grace, would not send them away hungry. I think that would be the Lord ministering to us in these wilderness surroundings. What a rich ministry He has given over many years, what a compensation that is over against the literature of the world, and many other things like that. And then He would give us to be restful. There is something that is different. They say, "What is it?" A certain touch of admiration I think, as they saw something there so precious and different. It was nothing of Egypt. There was nothing of Egypt about it, but they ate of it and were satisfied.

CFD Do you think we are challenged as to the matter of satisfaction to which you have just referred because really this is Christ once humbled, is it not? Are we satisfied with humble circumstances? Is this truly our outlook? If we are feeding on something else it will not be. But I think the appetite for, and, we may say, the diet of Christ once humbled helps us to walk here superior to all that is around us.

RT I think so. As we have said, these are practical things in our lives, that we do not have the things of the world. They did

not have them and they harked back after Egypt. The Lord says, Well, there is something else. If you do not have what Egypt would have for your support, He says, I will give you something very fine, something very different. It is like what Paul brings into Philippians, "Let this mind be in you", Phil 2: 5. He took a bondman's form, He was found in the circumstances of men, humbled Himself, becoming obedient. I think this is like the food of Philippians 2 that the Lord would give us some impression of the grace of Christ that covers the wilderness. Think of them going out in the morning and what they saw was this thing, fine as hoarfrost, covering the ground. Well, we have to tread our way through the wilderness but it is fine to think of Christ known to us in those circumstances, another kind of man that would produce another character in us.

JAP There is a very gracious touch in the sixteenth chapter, "Gather of it every man according to what he can eat". That would be skill in our houses—what we should bring in in the morning reading, or when we read. We are only able for so much, are we not? What would you say about that?

RT That is so. But I think this is personal as well as household, each for themselves. As we said earlier, each member has to eat. There may be light in the morning reading and light in the Scriptures, but unless I eat I am not going to have the grace and power to be different in this world. If we eat Egypt's food, we will be Egyptian, but if we are eating the manna we will be coming out in the character of the Man of Philippians 2. So it says, "Gather of it every man according to what he can eat". You say, We are not able for much, but Paul was trying to get the Corinthians to eat more. I do not think we eat enough. We may say we are not able for much and excuse ourselves, but as counting on the Spirit, He would expand our hearts to appreciate more this Man who was so different.

KNP It did not matter—the ones that gathered much had nothing left over and the ones that gathered little were satisfied. Does that show the greatness of what God can do with what we gather?

RT The Lord knows the daily exercises of our lives whether it is at school or in the home or at work, and I think He would give us enough to meet that exercise with a fresh impression of the Man who was here and how He met things. So that we are able to meet things not as an Egyptian would in the fierceness of the sword but we are able to be in the conflict in a different character. I think it would be a suffering character. The manna would help us to be prepared to suffer and to accept reproach and to be in the Spirit of Christ, not complaining. We sometimes feel the burdens are more than we can bear; well, there is manna, as much as we need to help bear the burdens.

LMcF It involved rising early before the sun came up. So it has to be an exercise in the household and it is daily.

RT I think that is important to emphasise, that it is daily. The Lord says, "Sufficient to the day is its own evil", Matt 6: 34. We sometimes project things a long way ahead and wonder how things are going to go, but it would be a feature of the wilderness pathway that it is day by day, and grace given for that day in view of strengthening us for the particular exercises of that day. We do not always know them, the enemy is very cunning and he brings things suddenly upon us. Things we did not expect come into our lives and sometimes from quarters that we did not expect, but the manna is there to give us the strength of character to be superior to these things. So Paul's word, "Let this mind be in you"—let it be. I think that is like gathering the manna, that we approach things on this level of admiration for the lowly grace of Christ. You can see as the people appreciated it, they were preserved. They began to despise it and they lost their taste and almost became ensnared in the Egyptian customs, but we should be exercised to keep our taste for the manna.

JAP What you remarked about the individual side—perhaps you have more to say—but I can see that the sisters must have their own links with the Lord. Our wives help us sometimes; they say I noticed this in the printed ministry or I noticed this in the Scripture. There is something coming in beside the family reading. Is that what you are pressing? And the children as they get older, some link with the Lord themselves.

RT I think so. There is light in the household, there is light in the local meeting, and in the Scriptures and in reading the ministry, but eating is something we can only do for ourselves. I think that is what helps us, because we are not always in the household, or with the brethren; we are alone at school, or at work, in circumstances where we are tested individually as to how much we appreciate and seek to take on the character of this Man who was here in lowly grace. The Lord Jesus, wherever He was—among Pharisees or Sadducees or in the temple or at His work—in every circumstance, He was there in divine grace filling it out to the Father's pleasure, even at twelve years of age. So it says, "This is the bread which Jehovah has given you to eat". Not just to say what is it and admire it—some men read the Scriptures just admiringly—but it is to be eaten, "This is the bread which Jehovah has given you to eat". They were to gather it and eat it. If they gathered it and did not eat it they did not get any gain from it; it was not lost exactly, but it was lost for them. So it says they did so; a fine feature of obedience in us. I think that is a great feature of this feeding, both on the passover and on the manna; it produces a contented, obedient spirit in the saints that is leadable to go forward into the land.

CFD I think what you said about things being thrust on us, unexpectedly it might be; they test us very much. You do not have time to think about what you are going to say. The appropriation of this at the beginning of the day—it says, "they had gathered every man according to the measure of his eating"—household prayer is good, but the individual side would provide for us when the enemy is going to suddenly thrust something on us that we did not anticipate. This always proves to be a test, does it not?

RT Yes, I think so. As eating the passover we come into the wilderness and we find there that the same grace is serving us to find our way. If the world has its resources for us, there are resources in the manna and it is gathered in the morning and it is enough for the whole day. I do not suppose they ate it all in the morning; there is enough there to see us through until the next time.

When we come to Joshua it may be a very big exercise in our lives. It was not just something that was at hand for them exactly. In chapter 1 it says, "Prepare yourselves victuals, for in three days ye shall pass over this Jordan". The lamb was provided and the manna was there in abundance to be gathered, but here now they are facing something else. He says, "Prepare yourselves victuals, for in three days ye shall pass over this Jordan". We all come to certain testing exercises in our lives and without belittling the manna, there is more than that needed. The manna gives us grace in the wilderness but certain crucial exercises come into all our lives. How are we going to meet them? We may not have family or friends to help us—thank God when in our exercises, we can count on the brethren—but he says, "Prepare yourselves victuals," something they had to do for themselves. So what is our resource going to be when we have a difficult exercise? The Lord would give us some fresh food as we seek it, and wisdom and power to meet these crucial matters.

CFD Does prayer come into all this? There is much said about the eating and the appropriating, which really give us a constitution to face things, but I wondered if prayer comes into this which would be the secret of our dependence on God.

RT Yes, I am sure it would. It says, "Prepare yourselves victuals, for in three days ye shall pass over this Jordan"; it was a way they had not gone before. We come to that in our lives, may be more than once, but at times exercises come that we have not gone this way before. Now as you say, What is our resource? I think it would be in prayer; "Our Father who art in the heavens", Matt 6: 9. He says that our very hairs are numbered. He comes down to the details of our lives to gain our confidence. When a difficult exercise comes where do we turn? We turn to our Father and His precious care and interest in us, do you think?

LDP I was wondering whether in 2 Timothy 4 Paul had that in mind. He says, "At my first defence no man stood with me, but all deserted me. May it not be imputed to them. But the Lord stood with me, and gave me power" v 16, 17.

RT That is a very fine scripture, "the Lord stood with me". Well, when we come to these exercises, do we put ourselves in a position where the Lord can stand with us or do we court worldly resources and the Lord cannot stand with us. But as you say, Paul prepared himself for the circumstances, and the Lord stood with him and gave him power.

LMcF The footnote to 'victuals' is venison, which is strong meat. How do we apply that please?

RT I think it is a deeper appreciation of Christ, that we see and appropriate Him as one who in His personal glories was able for everything. It connects with Colossians because they were to have their eye on the ark, as well as preparing these victuals. In Colossians we have this word, "have your mind on the things that are above," Col 3: 2. It is looking at the Lord and seeing Him as One who has been through the circumstances of death, and it was death that was in mind here. But it would apply to deep exercises in our lives, I think, that the Lord personally has met them. Preparing ourselves involves fixing our minds on Him to acquire grace and strength for the difficulties that face us, do you think?

LMcF Yes, that is very helpful.

RT So he says in Colossians, "have your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth". In these exercises the earthly things are not going to help us, but "Prepare yourselves"—you feed on the Lord Jesus and His personal, glorious worth. It is a bit like what the Lord said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life", John 11: 25. That was a great exercise in their lives, their brother had died; He says, "Believest thou this?" They had light; she said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection": the Lord says, "I am the resurrection and the life". They were there feeding on the victuals.

ASH It says, "for in three days ye shall pass over this Jordan". What is your thought as to the three days? Christ was in the heart of the earth three days and three nights, does that have any bearing on this?

RT Yes, it is a complete period. I was only applying it to our exercises that there is a big matter before us. And these things have entered into our lives; these exercises of divisions among the brethren as well as critical times in our lives. Three days is a protracted exercise and I think there is a particular need for apprehending Christ in His glorious greatness as the Victor over death and everything else in view that we may be strong enough to go through the exercise in triumph.

KNP The thought of being buried together with Him and then raised together with Him (Col 2: 12)—is that the idea, "pass over this Jordan"? That is our death with Him, is it not?

RT That is a very good touch. That is Colossians, identification with Him, and seeing how He went through the Jordan. What happened as He went, the power of Jordan was completely broken. We need help in these very difficult matters that we have to go through, to see how Christ has taken the power out of the enemy's hand and He is above. So, as preparing ourselves, we are in touch with what is above that we may go through in triumph.

JAP The reference you made in John 11 is very helpful, that He said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life". It is not the Lord Jesus as Saviour now but His Person. That is a great lesson how great the Person is who has gone through death; "I am", He says.

RT And He says to her, "Believest thou this?" That is a word for us. Do we believe it? He is greater than the exercise because He has dealt with the enemy in his own domain, and now here He is above to be food for our souls in the way He dealt with the exercise that we may be identified with Him in view of passing over. When they did pass over in chapter 5 what they found was another food, the old corn of the land. These things were there together, the passover and the manna and then there is the old corn of the land. We find not only that He has been enough to get us through the exercise but that He is there to sustain us in a heavenly environment in the glory of His Person.

JAP It is the old corn of the land—they were not to store up the manna but the old corn of the land seems to have something further. Maybe you could help us?

RT The manna was provisional in that sense. We are not always in the wilderness. The Lord helps us through it but He gives us another food, to be at home in heavenly circumstances. It is fine to get through your day's work and the day's exercises, to be in the atmosphere of a Christian home and the local company. The old corn of the land is enjoyed in the local meeting where you get a touch of Christ as the One who is glorified, the risen, ascended One, leading on to "My Father and your Father, and to my God and your God", John 20: 17. So it is fine to go from Egypt, to be delivered from the bondage of the world to be in the liberty of enjoying, "My Father and your Father", is it not? And in every detail of our lives Christ is enough. What grace that He comes down to the details and the sorrows and the exercises to bring us to feed on the old corn of the land. We did not prepare it, but it gives us strength to enjoy the fruit, the pomegranates and the grapes, and these houses that we did not build, the old corn of the land gives us strength to enjoy our heavenly portion. These different foods show how Christ in His grace would sustain us that we may be brought into our true place and at liberty in it.

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"BROUGHT TO GOD"

Exodus 19: 3-6; 21: 5, 6
1 Peter 2: 9, 10

In Exodus 19, God says, I have brought you to myself; from all that we were as once far off to Himself. It was all His own activities. He took up the children of Israel as slaves in Egypt, to be His own possession. He says, all the earth is mine, and yet He chose them as He has chosen us. What barriers there were in the way. He says, I have borne you on eagles' wings. What divine power has been exercised on our behalf by God to bring us to Himself. Peter tells us that the Lord Jesus once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, 1 Pet 3: 18. He has cleared the ground righteously to bring us to Himself. There is not a power in the universe that can challenge the fact that God has exercised His rights in sovereign mercy to bring us to Himself. It all has found its origin in His own heart of love—there was nothing in us. The Egyptians were, I suppose, in many ways, more wealthy, but God passed over them and chose the Israelites as He has chosen you and me, not only to forgive us our sins—what a wonderful matter that is on the way, bringing out the strength of His love for us, but the great end is to bring us to Himself. I wonder if we have come all the way, dear brethren, to Himself. We appreciate what He has done for us, that our sins are gone, and gone ever more, never to be raised again. That was all part of God bearing them on eagles' wings. Pharaoh pursued them but he could not touch them. There is much in our own hearts that may hinder us and condemn us. John says, "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart", 1 John 3: 20. There are those eagles' wings that He has used in power to rise and soar above all the circumstances here. Nothing could hinder those activities of divine mercy and grace to bring us to Himself. All Satan's forces were harnessed against Christ at the cross. Every power and resource that the devil could muster, political power and every other force was there against Christ; the stone rolled against the tomb, sealed with the Roman seal, they were all humiliated by divine power in raising Christ from among the dead, that our faith and hope might be

in God. That was how God acted in the superiority of divine power to liberate us, from all that we were in our sins, and from the surroundings of bondage. We would all have some sense of how God has acted for us in simple details of life. I wonder if we appreciate that the heart of God brings us all the way, not only to be forgiven, wonderful fact that it is to be forgiven for our sins; John says that to the little children, "your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake" 1 John 2: 12. That Name and its authority silences every challenge to the fact that your sins, through faith in Christ and His precious, finished work, are forgiven for His Name's sake.

Well, that is on the way, as I have said. God would have much more than that, He wants to bring us to Himself, not only to know what He has done for us, "Things … which God has prepared for them that love him", 1 Cor 2: 9. Peter, again says, "the time past is sufficient" (1 Pet 4: 3)—that would be like the "And now" of this section—for the rest of time to be to God's will. So He says, "If ye will hearken to my voice". You know He has a lot more to say to us; not only that thy sins are forgiven for Christ's Name's sake, blessed relief, but God has a lot more to say to us as we come to Himself. He wants to speak about His dwelling among them in the tabernacle, the great system of which the ark is to be the centre. Not only that Christ once died for our sins, but He lives in relation to a system of praise and blessing where God is served. So He wants to bring us into the divine service; He says, "And now, if ye will hearken to my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then shall ye be my own possession out of all the peoples". What a blessed proposal, "ye shall be my own possession". That is what the Lord would give us a sense of as we appreciate these eagles' wings, that we belong to Him, we are His possession. And then He brings us into this great system functioning Godward. He has put substance in our souls as we have traced His ways of mercy and wisdom. Paul speaks about that, "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable his judgments, and untraceable his ways!" Rom 11: 33. So God would have us to commit ourselves. That is what this section brings in—are we going to commit ourselves to the God who has brought us this

way? We stand here now in this moment, "And now", God says, I have done all this, what is your reaction? I think the reaction is in the Hebrew bondman. He says, "I love my master, my wife, and my children". Are we going to be like this Hebrew bondman and say distinctly, "I love my master, my wife, and my children", to be committed to the circumstances into which divine grace has brought us? He says, I love, I will not go free. How many have gone free; they have accepted the blessings of Christianity, the forgiveness of sins and maybe even have come to know the gift of the Spirit, and yet living to themselves, not having understood what it is to be brought to myself. They have appreciated the relief without coming into the fulness of what divine love has purposed. This man evidently came into the gain and the blessedness of the grace of the divine proposals and those eagles' wings, and when the opportunity came he says, "I will not go free": He wanted to live in the realm of divine blessing. The forgiveness of sins, justification by faith, these things, may I say, stand at the threshold of coming to God. God in justifying us and even in bringing in reconciliation is only preparing us for the house. When the younger son came back to his father, there were those activities outside the house. The father brought out the robe, and the ring and the shoes, and that would be like this; the father brings it out, and the younger son says, I will go in. There he is in the robe and the ring and the shoes, experiencing what the eagles' wings have done in view of knowing the father's heart inside. And that is what this man is saying distinctly, I love, I will not go free; he says, I do not want to live to myself in my own circumstances, my own surroundings, but I want to live in the wealth of what divine love has proposed—"a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation". This man comes into the gain of the great system of the priesthood and into the great environment of serving God in the tabernacle system. It is fine to go in, not only to see the offerings in the court and appreciate the laver—divine provision for us on account of our state and our condition—but to know something of the inside position; the fragrant incense of the golden altar. This man comes into it all through committing himself. He says, I love, I will not go free. I not only appreciate what you have done for me, I want to be near

you, your household. God has a household here in the local meeting and He would encourage us to say we are not going to go free. In exercises that come up we are not pleasing ourselves but we are accepting divine regulation in the circumstances and we want to be part of them. That is what this man wanted to do. He could have gone free and had reminiscences about the time and all that the master had done for him, but he would be outside the house. You may say, he committed himself to the fellowship of His Son. The responsibilities of the fellowship he accepted in having his ear bored through with the awl, and the privileges of the fellowship he came into as he says, I will not go free. We have not been called into a formal system of priesthood but we have been called into the fellowship of His Son and we come into the joys and blessedness of it through saying distinctly, I will not go free. How wonderful to appreciate the Master, that we want to be in the circumstances that He has ordered for us in His house. So that man with his ear bored through; wherever he went you would see that he belonged to another. He would demonstrate in the way he lived, where he went, how he did things in his business, and in the home, that he was not pleasing himself. But his circumstances were regulated in relation to the master's house and the laws of that house, because there are certain laws attached to the house of God. Jacob came to a point where he learned that it was best to live in the house of God, not in his own arrangements where he had experienced both prosperity and disappointments, but when Joseph was born, Jacob got a view of another kind of man typically and he says, I have to readjust my life. In principle, Jacob came to have his ear bored through with the awl when Joseph came into his life and he says, I will have to leave these circumstances that I am in. I cannot live here, in the distance, I want to live in the environment and the area of the fellowship in the circumstances that God has ordained. So Jacob arose and took his journey to Bethel, the house of God. What wonderful blessing he came into, though not without exercises, but he came to live in the house of God where the laws of the house regulate his circumstances, not the other way round, but the principles of the fellowship become regulating to him. Think of the Father's pleasure in all who

commit themselves to the fellowship of His Son, as well as the joy of the brethren. We are all tested in our lives, in different circumstances. Most of the time I believe we are being tested and we do not know it. The bondman was tested and he knew it and he rose to the test. But there are many circumstances in simple things that come up in our lives that test us and the Father appreciates when we answer to the test. Some of these tests are very severe; the Lord tests His own work and He finds great pleasure in seeing persons rising to the test, not doing it just because the brethren think it is the right thing to do, but He finds great pleasure in hearing a person rising to the test saying, I love, I love my Master and I accept that the arrangements that you have made are the best arrangements for me, and I want to live in them. Peter seeking to encourage the suffering saints in testing circumstances reminds them of what they are. He says, "*ye* are a chosen race, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation". God has exercised the prerogatives of His love to enrich us and He would have us to rise to some sense of how He has brought us to Himself as enriched. It says He is bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2: 10), not sinners saved by grace only, precious beginning, but it says He is bringing sons to glory. You can visualise this letter coming into their hands as they were persecuted; some had lost their possessions, separated from their families, mourning the sorrows of the present time as they must have been. Peter says, "*ye* are a chosen race". He would lift us above the confusion to have God's thoughts about ourselves. The Holy Spirit would give us this in a real way today, "a chosen race". It is not one company, it is all the redeemed; all the redeemed are chosen, chosen in Him before the world's foundation, Eph 1: 4. How blessed to get some sense of that in your soul. Maybe you are in a day when you feel the sufferings of the present time, the persecutions at work, of men who would ridicule persons who confess the name of Jesus; then the Spirit will give you a sense you are one of a chosen race. God sees these activities of men against the saints and in His own time He will intervene in favour of His elect and He will judge the ungodly. We can leave that to Him as we have a sense of His love as bearing us on eagles' wings and bringing us to Himself. So He would give us amidst these rebuffs to have

some sense that we are a chosen race and then a kingly priesthood. He would have us in the midst of all the confusion to put on the festival robes, to enjoy the wealth of His purposes in relation to us—"a people for a possession". How beautiful that is, that God wants to live among His people. That is why He has called us out of Egypt, into the fellowship of His Son, that He might enjoy His saints as enriched and clothed with divine thoughts. So Peter writes that we may enjoy these heavenly things; he says, "that ye might set forth the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light; who once were not a people, but now God's people; who were not enjoying mercy, but now have found mercy". The Lord would just help us that in all the sorrows, and the confusion of breakdown, there is to be some testimony among the saints, but it would go out too to others, "that ye might set forth the excellencies of him". That is not only praising the Lord Jesus for forgiving us our sins but I think it is appreciating the great wealth and depth of His love—"set forth the excellencies". The people here are in wonderful triumph, great overcomers. They are not only able for the breakdown; they are to be a testimony in their way of life and are able to fill out the service of God; "set forth the excellencies of him who has called you". What a tribute there is in the praises of the saints to the excellencies of Him who has called us. Tomorrow morning, if the Lord will, we will have a fine opportunity for the expression of the excellencies of divine grace and divine love—the excellencies of it. But then it is not only to be in word, it is to be in our lives, I think. There is a certain triumph in the believer that he owes nothing to this world, but in this very world of darkness, strife and confusion he is setting forth the true grace of God. He is setting forth the features of another Man, the Man Christ Jesus. I believe our hearts would be exercised to be setting forth the excellencies, not living in poverty but we are living in the royal apartments, where there is that heavenly food and those heavenly clothes that we are able to come out as princes, here amidst the darkness and the confusion, belonging to the royal household and setting forth the excellencies of Him who has called you. Well, to set forth the excellencies of the royal household we must live in the royal household, we must live in that realm

and we must maintain the dignity of what belongs to that household. There is a certain dignity that belongs to persons who are of the household of God. Jacob came to see that and he had his name changed as he was coming to live in the circumstances of the house of God. God passed him through an experience and He says, You are no longer Jacob but you are Israel, a prince of God. So God would enrich us as we come into the house, as we come into the area of the fellowship of His Son. In our manners, our ways, our habits of life there is a tribute and a testimony to the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness. The features of darkness no longer apply to saints but they are vessels of light. They are here in the midst of this generation as lights in the world, setting forth His excellencies. They are a tribute to another Man, and to the fact that there is another world with wonderful resources to maintain us here in the joy of our heavenly calling.

May we be encouraged to live in it, to come in as committed in our affections to the Master to prove the wealth and the joy of all that is pervading in the house that we may be here in faith and in the joy of our heavenly calling. For Christ's Name's sake.

NEW YORK

7th December 1996

VESSELS SERVICEABLE TO THE MASTER

Romans 9: 22-24
2 Timothy 2: 19-23
Ezra 8: 31-34
Nehemiah 12: 31-41, 43

I seek the Lord's help on this occasion to say something about being serviceable to the Master. I believe the Lord would say today to every believer, The Lord has need of you. He would leave a sense of that on our spirits from this occasion. That is why He went to the cross; to remove the liability of our sins; He took them all away because He has need of us. To the very youngest we would say, He needs you. You may say, What can I do? The Lord would address that word to each of us at this moment. The cost was so great because He has wonderful things in mind for you. He has need of you to swell the great praise of glory and response to God, and He has need of you too in the testimony.

In the first scripture he speaks of us as "vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory". A great wealth has gone into your history. You may think you have just been born on such a day, you have lived so many years, but there is a lot more than that in God's thoughts about you. It says here, "that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared for glory". What a sense to get into your soul that God has prepared you for glory. He has not prepared you for adorning this scene and all that man speaks of as glory. You notice that word between the commas, "us"; it means you and me. He has prepared us for glory. You say, Where is it? The God who has put so much thought into the preparation is not going to stop short of reaching His end. It speaks also of Him bringing many sons to glory. You may wonder when you look abroad and see the weakness and the confusion that exists, but God is bringing many sons to glory. O, how it would lift our thoughts and our sights at this time! It says, "that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy". What a treasure there is in these vessels! There was nothing in them to warrant it, but there they are, the precious products of His love.

I trust every one of us in this room has some sense that God has called us. He has called us from the circumstances in which we were so that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy. He wants to fill these vessels; He is filling them, and He has prepared them for glory. He has called them not only from among the Jews but also from among the nations. In previous times it was just the Jews who were called, but now through the great work of Christ in redemption, what has been effectuated in the shedding of His blood. His resurrection and going into heaven, God has come out in all the wealth of His love with His hands outstretched to bless. The call is going out universally, for persons to come into the wealth and blessedness of what God is securing in these vessels, preparing them for glory. He is not going to fall short, He is not going to be robbed of His thoughts, and that is why 2 Timothy 2 comes in.

Paul had written in 1 Timothy about the normal relations of God dwelling with His people in His house, but in 2 Timothy he does not speak like that exactly. There has been great confusion but, as soon as it came in, God provided and showed a way through it that vessels may still be serviceable to the Master. The vessels in Ezra and Nehemiah were carried away into captivity, and they awaited the time when God would bring them out of it, and He did bring them out of it as we shall see.

Here, immediately the breakdown came in, God showed in His grace that He had not changed His thoughts about these vessels of mercy being prepared for glory, and He showed us a way that the vessels may still be serviceable, "he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master". O that I could stir in all our hearts afresh today a desire to be serviceable to the Master! The Lord has need of you. Is He not worthy of our response, of our service? We cannot plead the breakdown for being unserviceable when He has shown us a way through it, but He would appeal to our hearts that we may be serviceable in the midst of it. We cannot get out of it completely, but He has shown us a way through it, however dark a day it may be, and however great the confusion, and

that way, beloved, is going forth to Him without the camp bearing His reproach.

How sad the breakdown of Christendom is. I suppose we feel those sorrows every day; the sorrows of what there is in the public profession; the sorrows of what men say of Christ and yet profess His name. Yet God would have us serviceable to the Master. One great feature is that we might come to love the Master. What a Master He is who has bought us! He would command our affections; that would be the first great feature of being serviceable, that we love the Master. How beautifully these words, uttered in the last dispensation, have run through this dispensation, "I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go free", Exod 21: 5. We hear them often, referring typically to Christ, the true Hebrew bondman, who took the position of being serviceable to His Master. What service He rendered and renders still in all His priestly grace. He has gone into heaven, and He is engaged in service there, sustaining us in His grace and love, that we may, in our measure be serviceable to our Master. He has shown us the way, a way of suffering for Him as He took His place in the likeness of men, in these circumstances that we are in. Satan tried to take Him out of them. Think of Jesus in the temptations as He says, "Man shall not live by bread alone", Matt 4: 4. When Satan proposed the glory without the suffering in the way He spoke to the Lord, there He is meeting Satan with the word of God. He would undertake the pathway of suffering to be serviceable.

What a model for us as we come to these times that we are in. It says, "Yet the firm foundation of God stands", that will never break down. The foundation is in Christ; it is in the counsels of God's love and whatever comes into the dispensation today or in the future, the firm foundation of God stands. Then it says, "The Lord knows those that are his". You can rest on that for all believers. Our sorrow is that we do not know them all. If things were normal we should know every believer in the towns we live in, but things are not normal, yet the Lord knows. We have to leave that and I trust we speak to Him in prayer like that about certain that we know, He knows. Their ways may have become wayward, they

may have turned into their own way, but "The Lord knows those that are his". It is a comfort for our souls that we can leave persons with the Lord. We may over-estimate some of them at times, we cannot just take persons for granted, but the Lord knows.

The word to us is, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity". It is the way to be serviceable. So many try, and are alas still trying, staying in those conditions to help others there, but that is not the way the Lord seems to dictate, because this section is a command. It is a warranty too for being serviceable to the Master—"Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity". Well, we cannot name the name of the Lord and abide in the confusion. But as naming it, sometimes they will put you out, and that is salvation too. The man in John 9, in some sense named the name of the Lord and they put him out; that had to do with his salvation. You cannot have the name of the Lord and iniquity, these things hinder us being serviceable; but it has happened and is still happening; there are vessels of mercy who are the Lord's, but they have become unserviceable through remaining in iniquitous surroundings. So if we are going to be serviceable it requires that we separate.

There is a great system that professes the name of Christ, and yet persons in the hierarchy deny the deity of Christ. That is systematised error, and it is iniquitous. How I long that persons who are real believers in these systems, when they hear such things, would leave them. It is the only way, but there they are, drawn in and held trying to help others. But that is not the way to be serviceable. It says here the way to be serviceable is to "withdraw from iniquity". Then it says, "If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, in separating himself from them". How can I live in those circumstances where Christ is denied and keep myself pure? We can see that in these systems they take on language that is no longer suited to vessels of mercy; they begin to adorn themselves, and promote man in the house of God. So the only way to be clear of it is, as it says here, "in separating himself ... he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master". O, would you not like to be

serviceable to the Master? It applies to my daily pathway. Am I prepared, in affection for the Master, to keep myself serviceable?

The Lord has need of you. He has some wonderful things in mind for these vessels. How can a vessel that is ensnared in the systems of men be a testimony to His love and grace? How can a vessel that the Lord would employ in praise to His God and Father be ensnared? How could it be serviceable to Him if ensnared in these things that have come into the profession? He would have us to be sanctified, serviceable for every good work. We have to do this individually. For most of us, our fathers went through the sorrows and pressures in the deep exercises of these things. Others have laboured and we have entered into their labours, John 4: 38. There are men who went before us whom we would speak of with great affection, who showed us the way through the confusion. There were persons who clearly interpreted some of these things for us, and took on themselves the sufferings and reproach. I know an old lady who, when she was a girl of seventeen, left the established church, and her parents put her out of the house. Others have laboured and we have entered into their labours. The ground is open to you, dear brother, dear sister, it has not been easily won. You say there is a great deal of reproach on us, but others have shown us the way to come into assembly circumstances, and to know assembly relations. For them it involved a great deal of suffering and reproach, but there is still reproach to be taken on, in our daily path and in our exercises, in separating ourselves so as to be vessels, "serviceable to the Master". Then it says, "with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart". The persons who are going to be serviceable to the Master identify themselves by calling upon the Lord out of a pure heart. What a door He opens for us as we call upon Him out of a pure heart.

So earlier in the chapter it speaks about the soldier seeking to please Him that has enlisted him. The Lord has enlisted and called you in saying He has need of you. He has shown us the way through the confusion, and now He would call upon us to please Him who has enlisted us. That is the

way through these exercises that we may be serviceable to the Master. There are certain places that are out of bounds to soldiers, certain places they cannot go into, as Paul says, "No one going as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of life", 2 Tim 2: 4. A soldier is a very definite calling, he does not entangle himself with politics, and other things, in order that "he may please him who has enlisted him". He has enlisted us, dear brethren. He has called us as vessels of mercy into this great realm before prepared for glory. He would have us to be free in it and to enter into the blessedness of the way through the confusion to be serviceable to the Master. There is the way to be serviceable in testimony, and there is also the way that He would employ us as serviceable in His praise.

The vessels in Ezra had been led away into captivity through their unfaithfulness; that is how the breakdown has come in in our time too through our unfaithfulness. Whereas in Ezra, God waited some time to show them the way back, in our day God has shown us immediately a way through the breakdown. I read these verses to show the glory of what comes back. It says, "the vessels were weighed … the whole by number and by weight; and all the weight was written down at that time". How pleasing that must have been to heaven. What did it mean? I think it meant there were none missing. You say, What toll the breakdown has taken! What toll the captivity must have taken, but in the process of coming back it says they came to Jerusalem. That is where the separation of 2 Timothy brings us; it leads us on to assembly ground, with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. It brings us into an area of singing, an area of blessing. What sorrow they must have known in the captivity, and what journeys they must have taken, it says here, "we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days". I think of their spirits rising as they came to that beloved city. What history attached to that city, all the time they had been in captivity they were thinking of Jerusalem.

Think of them coming through the breakdown, separating themselves, going through these exercises, and as they came to Jerusalem their hearts would be filled with God's thoughts about Jerusalem. Here they are, in principle, "with

those that call on the Lord"; they come to this area of divine purpose and blessing. God had said about it that it would be the joy of the whole earth, and there it was, it had been in ruins. But the vessels are brought through, "the gold and the vessels were weighed in the house of our God". What a weight attached to them, not only that they were numbered, but they were weighed. I think they became more precious as coming through the breakdown. As taking up these exercises in Timothy, the vessels take on weight and capacity that they never had before. In the saints who have gone through those deep exercises and sorrows, you see vessels of weight; they are no longer only numbered. Maybe you are numbered among the saints; thank God for it, it is a fine thing. But they were not only numbered, they were weighed. What joy there must have been as these vessels were put on the scales. Maybe in Babylon they had been abused, but they still retained their glory and all the weight was written down. They represent persons of substance secured for the house of God, vessels of mercy prepared for glory.

What a time it was in Nehemiah when he brought up these two great choirs. We did not read the earlier verses which show the way they came, from the plain of the Jordan and from Beth-Gilgal, Neh 12: 28, 29. They came through these exercises we have spoken of in separating themselves from them, typically, to see that the death of Christ could not allow them to remain in confused circumstances. They came from Beth-Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba, and they began to sing. They had hung their harps upon the willows earlier. We know these exercises in ourselves. There was a time when they could not sing because of the pressure and sorrows, but as vessels of mercy, coming into Jerusalem they were beginning to sing. So it says that Nehemiah "brought up the princes of Judah". See how they are taking on royalty now instead of being spoiled in man's systems. Here they are taking on dignity, "the princes of Judah upon the wall ... two great choirs". There is wonderful detail and wealth in these scriptures of the ways that the choirs went, typifying the exercises they had gone through, in having to rebuild things, the exercises involved in the dung-gate, the sheep-gate, and

the prison-gate. All these things speak volumes as we allow the Spirit to open them up to us.

What I had in mind is that they come here with the musical instruments of David the man of God. These had not become damaged; they are there, great instruments of music. David spoke about the instruments of music which he had made. I suppose most of them were stringed instruments, and the strings had been tightened as they came that way by the Jordan and by Gilgal. In our day, as we come by 2 Timothy 2, the strings are tightened, and how sweet the note becomes. That is true, dear brethren, among the saints of God today. Have you not heard it? As you hear someone who has gone through these sorrows speaking to the Father of His love and grace, how sweet the note! It is not here singing from the hymn book or prayer book, it is the musical instruments of David, the man of God. I say in passing it is the only reference to David being a man of God; he is a man of God for his music, not because he slew Goliath, great thing as that was. The great point of Christ and His service is that there may be these instruments to sing the praises of God. May we, dear brethren, be serviceable to the Master, with our strings tightened so that the praises and the music may ascend in all their sweetness and glory. Then it says, "they went up by the stairs of the city of David".

One thing that strikes you about these recoveries is that they did not try to put new names to things, they kept to the names that were there before. Today they are bringing new names into things, saying, 'That is only Paul; we do not need to go by that'. But these persons in the recovery they went by the principles that God had laid down. Then too it says, "they stood still in the prison-gate". What thoughts must have been in their minds as they stood still in the prison-gate. Maybe they would be thinking of those they had left, still in prison. Christ went that way, the way of the prison, to open the way so that musical instruments may be formed, and that they may be responsive to His touch. So it says, "both choirs stood in the house of God". That is the great end, the house of God. In 2 Timothy 2 there is the great house, a place of confusion, but here it is back to the original principle, they "stood in the

house of God". It says, "also the women and the children rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off".

They appointed singers and door-keepers; they were watchful that the breakdown should not intrude. It is very striking that the singers were first. I think it is the singers who are the door-keepers. If you do not know how to sing you will never know how to keep the door, because you let in the wrong notes. The singers and the door-keepers are there to serve in the great system of praise that we have been called to, and in which we are to be serviceable to the Master. Now may we have a clear view, dear brethren, that being serviceable to the Master truly involves the separation we speak of in 2 Timothy 2, but the great end in view is that we may be available as instruments of music so that the praise of God may be secured in the house of God. Soon it will be in His own environment in heaven above, but now it is that the character and features of the house of God are here at the present time, and that God is praised by these instruments. May it be so increasingly with each one of us, as serviceable to the Master for His praise.

BRECHIN

8th March 1997

THE FEAR OF GOD

Malachi 3: 13-18; 4: 1-4 (to "servant")
1 Peter 1: 17-23

These scriptures make it very plain that God is to be feared. It is something that increasingly is becoming lacking. Laodicea did not fear God: she had grown rich and was independent. And that is the state of things that is abroad today. It may well creep in to our own hearts to be independent of God, to lose the fear of God. He has been made known in grace as Father in all His love, and yet He is to be feared. We sometimes offset that and say it is not a slavish fear but Scripture is plain that God is to be feared. The scripture says of the Lord Jesus that He was "heard because of his piety"—'in that he feared', Heb 5: 7 KJV. We often say that we know God hears us. Well, it says of the Lord that He was heard 'in that he feared'. God may not hear us, not that I would put any doubts or discouragement on people praying, but there is a reason why the Lord was heard in that instance. It was 'in that he feared' or "because of his piety".

In these scriptures you can see God hears and His eye is on them that fear Him. The Lord said that too, "Fear ... him", Matt 10: 28. That is what it says about certain notable persons in Scripture, that they feared God. Nehemiah says of one that he was "a faithful man and feared God above many", chap 7: 2. What a commendation to have in a world such as that in which we are of lawlessness and independence. Joseph says that too about himself. He says, "I fear God", Gen 42: 18. It is a good answer to give to persons when they ask why we are not doing this or that, why we do not even speak their language, do not go where they go. "I fear God". God honours that and here He is honouring persons in a day such as we are in when people say, what is the advantage? You will get people saying that to you, Why be so strict? Why do you go to so many meetings? Why do you need to do this? Why do you not go there? That is the day in which we are. Well, the answer is that we fear God. We honour Him in that sense and God honours those that fear Him. In Malachi they were saying there is no point in it, like the days that we are in, when people

are saying all these things: the scripture says, “Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another”. They lived on different principles. Their life was coloured in that they chose to walk in the fear of God, chose to tread a separate path because at the end of the day, the Lord says, the most that men can do is kill you; that is the extent of what they can do, but after that God has to be answered. He says, “Fear ... Him who is able”, to destroy both body and soul in hell. His rights extend beyond death, beyond the grave. These people were walking as fearing God and God “heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared Jehovah”, not persons that were intelligent and bright and knowledgeable, but think of Him writing down those names! Think of God writing down your name and against it He puts those words, ‘he feared me’. What a commendation, as I have said! And that is how God was writing this book, “for them that feared Jehovah”. The day of judgment is coming, of which Malachi is speaking, and God is writing up this book, as it were, and He sees certain names there that are spared the judgment because they feared Him. They did not walk in the way that the rest of men lived. They were not driven by the principles of the world. And He spared them “as a man spareth his own son”. Think of God looking down on the saints like that! What pleasure He has in the midst of the day we are in, that there are persons who walk in His fear! So He says about them, “And unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings”. He gives to persons that fear His name the light of another day, and that is a great governing principle that we walk in, the light of another day. This day is fast declining. The world in which we are and its system is fast going on to judgment, but God says, “And unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and leap like fatted calves”, persons that have been enriched in the light of another day, able to go against the stream in the fear of God, irrespective of what men may do or of what things may seem publicly.

Peter in writing to the brethren reminds them that things are in God’s hands, not in man’s hands. Irrespective

of what has come in in the breakdown and the confusion that exists publicly, and the love of the many perhaps having waxed cold, things are in God's hands. Peter is encouraging these saints as to that. And now he says, if you call on the Father, remember that He is God, all majesty, might and power belong to Him. To know our Father is God is a wonderful thing to remember and to lay hold of. That God is our Father is true and speaks of the wonderful blessings, the resources of His love and of His care He brings into the relationship, that He is a Father to us. But that Father is God, and that means that He is to be reverenced. Peter says, because of that you "pass your time of sojourn in fear", knowing that to Him belongs the last word. Men may misunderstand grace. It is a day of great licence, a day when we are apt to take licence, dear brethren, but remember that the Father is God. Peter says if you are invoking Him as Father, you are to "pass your time of sojourn in fear", not in slavish fear, as we say, but in reverence as to what is due to His name, that He has the last word. He is writing His book of remembrance of them that fear Him. Think of these dispersed Jews being in that book! Peter says, "knowing that ye have been redeemed". Redemption is not just something that would free us from our sins and our guilt, but redemption has in view relationship. When we speak of redemption, we go back to Ruth and she was redeemed to be the wife of Boaz. She was not just redeemed to remove her Moabitish history and live differently, but she was redeemed to be the wife of Boaz. So redemption has in view that we are brought to know God as our Father, and we know the grace and the love of that relationship; but we walk too in the light of His majesty and His greatness and to Him belongs the last word.

So it says, "ye have been redeemed" from vain conversation, handed down from your fathers, from worldly principles and things, and worldly customs, to walk as the redeemed. The redeemed should have a very deep appreciation of the Redeemer. Ruth must have adoringly looked on Boaz all her days. He who had the right of redemption was not able, but think of Boaz stepping in, taxing His own resources, you might say, but still able to do it, to

remove the burden and the load that she might come into the liberty of being a true Israelite. She comes into the genealogy. That is what redemption brings us into, a great line of royalty, and I think that is what marks those who fear God, that they are walking on a royal line. If you acknowledge that your Father is God, it means you are a prince. You walk as a prince, not as ordinary men. There are some persons who have the devil for their father. What a solemn thing, sons of the devil. It speaks of some like that in scripture (see Acts 13: 4), a warning to us as to what men are under, but persons who invoke God as their Father are walking in this precious light of redemption in princely steps. They are exhibiting the features of the family showing that they fear God when they are tested by circumstances.

In these verses Peter goes on to encourage them as to the glory of what they have been brought into by the blood of Christ, showing the extent of His love for us and the favour He would bring us into. It says, He "has been manifested at the end of times for your sakes, who by him do believe on God". You are thus brought into a system of grace, of liberty and life and blessing, "who by him do believe on God". Joseph said, "I fear God". He walked in the light of that, the ruler of Egypt, the man who could have had everything he wanted in that country. He says, "I fear God". May we be helped, dear brethren, to walk in the joy and the liberty of what we have been brought into and yet walking, as Peter speaks of it here, passing "your time of sojourn in fear". It means we are not doing what we like, but we are walking in the principles of the kingdom. It says, "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom", Ps 111: 10. Intelligence comes through fearing God.

Well, here it is all shining for us in Christ: "Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth". We are coming into these things, not toeing the line or obeying rules, but, in the fear of God, we are led into a circle of blessing, a circle of love. It says, "that your faith and hope should be in God" and then you are brought into this circle of the brethren, "unfeigned brotherly love, love one another out of a pure heart fervently". Peter goes over these things that the saints were to enjoy in that broken day. May we be helped to be living in the

fear of God in the circumstances that exist today, in the liberty of loving the brethren fervently, and of knowing God and the blessedness of being His sons, walking before Him in all the light and the liberty that is ours in a broken time when there is departure all around. May we be encouraged in loyalty to One who has brought us at such a price for Christ's name's sake!

KIRKCALDY

22nd July 1997

"PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD"

Ephesians 4: 1-7
Revelation 14: 13

Our brother whose death and burial is the occasion of our being together today lived the last twenty-six years of his life in very severe limitation, but there are few who enjoyed more their heavenly part. He was ever ready to speak of his heavenly portion and his Saviour in spite of the severe restrictions in his body. The testimony today is in circumstances of limitation but in no way should that hinder the enjoyment of our heavenly portion. Indeed, I would say that the acceptance of the limitations gives us a door into the enjoyment of our heavenly portion. Undue regard of the limitations may hinder at the present time our enjoying what is the hope of our calling.

Paul here is writing as the prisoner in the Lord. It is remarkable that he should write like that, but I think he does so to appeal to us, as our brother appealed to us. His body, speech, walk were an appeal to us as to the acceptance of the limitations as a door into the enjoyment of spiritual things. Paul perhaps had a chain as he wrote this. "I, the prisoner". Think of him writing the letter to the Ephesians as a prisoner in the Lord! You say, Paul you have been denied your liberty; you could have been a great man in the affairs of men. Well, he says, I have been "blessed ... with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ", chap 1: 3. The prison was no restriction for Paul. Indeed, his richest ministry, you may say, comes from the prison in the acceptance of the limitations.

Now, each of us is called to the acceptance of limitations if we are going to be in the testimony today. So many have kicked against them. They have sought an easier path, sought a way where they could express themselves and their natural abilities and their own way of life, but Paul is appealing here to us in bringing himself forward, to accept the limitations of the testimony as in reproach. The day of display will soon come, but as rejected in Matthew's gospel, the Lord calls the disciples into Galilee, where he says, "I am with you all the

days", Matt 28: 20. That includes today, these were the days of our brother's life as he felt the limitations of his body, that is the days in the testimony when there are great sorrow, having to part from many, perhaps being restricted in our employment: all these things are part of the limitations that lie on the saints in the testimony today, and Paul is encouraging us "to walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called". That cannot be as going hand-in-glove with the world. That cannot be as allowing worldly influences to dictate my way of life and how I spend my time and where I go and what I do. Paul is saying, "walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called". It is like the cloven hoof. As these clean animals trod their way, there was a mark left on the desert sand that was not like the others. There was a separate walk, a separate path, and our brother, I think, was an appeal among us as in the acceptance of limitations to accept them, not chafe under them, but to know the Lord who has placed us in these limitations and, as I say, come through that doorway into enjoying our heavenly portion.

Paul is expanding on that in the epistle. He says, "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering". These are the features of the testimony: in the midst of the confusion of the day and man's pride and arrogance, there is the lowliness of Jesus. Where is lowliness and meekness? Where was it introduced into this world? Not in Adam, not in any man, but it was introduced in Jesus, the "meek and lowly in heart". He says, "Take my yoke upon you". That is the acceptance of the limitations. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me". It is these that we learn from Him, day by day, hour by hour, step by step—"learn from me" meekness and lowliness and long-suffering, "bearing with one another in love". The passage is very rich and Paul is using his own personality, his own position as a prisoner, to encourage the saints to walk thus under the Lord, "prisoner in the Lord". He had been taken captive. His Lord meant everything to him, not whether he could do this or do that, but the Lord's word meant everything to him. He went where the Lord would dictate, where the Lord would be. In the confused circumstances he would find where is the Lord, where is the Lord leading, where has He led? As I

say, our brother exemplified this and his very presence, his very body, was an appeal to us to accept the limitations, to come into the joy of the Lord.

The passage in Revelation says, "Blessed the dead who die in the Lord". Our brother went all the way. When circumstances arose, he did not say, Well, that is enough; the rest of the time for myself. No! He died in the Lord. A simple explanation of this passage is to die in harness. Our brother did that. Only a few weeks ago he gave us a word in the ministry meeting in his limitations. He spent the last hours among the brethren in supreme happiness. He died in the Lord. He died in harness. How will we die, dear brethren? How will we finish? Will it be in the path of the Lord's will? Will it be in the acceptance of the limitations? Will it be in the enjoyment of His love because it is in the acceptance of the limitations that His love is enjoyed. "I am with you". He said that to the saints because they went into Galilee. Had they not gone into Galilee, they would not have heard His word. May we accept the position! May our brother's life, his manner of life, the way he has conducted himself, leave a fresh appeal to all our hearts, to be in the path of the Lord's will under limitations, but in the enjoyment of the Lord's presence! When His presence is known, the limitations are gone. That will soon be. It is for our brother already—"with the Lord". The hymn that we sang encouraged me to speak these words, written by a man who lost his most prized possessions. He wrote—

Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul

(Hymn 238)

He had something in his soul, the things of this life or even death could not rob him of. He wrote in that hymn of the Lord's comfort following deepest sorrow, and the hope of His coming which he awaited. And that is what these passages speak of, "the dead who die in the Lord". How will it be with us, dear brethren? Die in company with Him? That is what is meant, that you are in the yoke, treading alongside of Him. Precious words you would get as you walked alongside Paul. I think of Onesiphorus going to visit him in the prison, the

prisoner in the Lord, and Paul telling him all about the epistle of the Ephesians, maybe writing it when he visited him. He has left us that beautiful legacy of these epistles, a man in limitations, but he is writing of his heavenly portion which is ours to be enjoyed as we come into these limitations under the Lord. May we all do it and may it be the portion of every one of us that we die in the Lord, for Christ's glory and praise for His Name's sake!

KIRKCALDY

21st August 1997

At a burial meeting

THREE PREACHINGS

Acts 2: 36; 3: 13-15; 4: 8-12

The verses that I have read come from what are perhaps three of the most outstanding preachings in the course of time. They are not outstanding for their length, nor for the man who spoke them, because he is spoken of elsewhere as unlettered and uninstructed, nor are they remarkable for how much is in them in the way of teaching, although that may be the case, but they are remarkable in this, that God used them to demonstrate and to inaugurate a dispensation of blessing. The circumstances were that the people to whom Peter was speaking were perhaps more guilty than man had been at any time in history, and yet God opened the windows of heaven in these preachings to inaugurate a dispensation of blessing that has continued to this very day. Men, especially in official bodies, have great ceremonies at their inaugurations, great resources are spent in inaugurating new things; and many of them very soon run out of resources, they cannot maintain the glory of the inauguration. But, in the glad tidings, the resources of divine love are still as full today as they were when they were inaugurated. The windows of heaven are still open in blessing. God is still disposed in the riches of His grace to meet guilty man in all his need, as He demonstrated here.

In one of the preachings of which we read there were three thousand souls blessed at one time. What a demonstration of God's attitude and disposition towards His guilty creature that was. There are no questions raised. God did not interview each one of those three thousand and ask them what they had done. He did not go over the details of their history to find out how guilty, more or less, they were, but He was there disposed to come out in all the wealth of His house to meet every condition in every one of them, to their satisfaction and relief, but too to His eternal glory.

In the first preaching, Peter tells the people that they were guilty of having crucified the Lord of glory. That is a solemn thing—the Man who had been there among them, who had healed their sick and raised their dead, and fed them too. Oh the

grace of Jesus, that when they were hungry He fed them, when they were blind He gave them sight, when they were in prison He released them, and yet they crucified Him! Peter brings that home to them, and no preaching of any worth would be right unless it brought home to the audience some sense that they were guilty in the sight of a holy God. You may say, Well I, am not guilty of having crucified Him. That may be. Peter was speaking to the audience here who were.

But then he says in the next preaching that "ye denied" Him. Perhaps you have denied Jesus. You may think you have not, but I say this in all sobriety and affection for you, that if you go out from a preaching of the Name of Jesus in the Spirit's grace without having confessed His Name, you are guilty of having denied the Saviour. You may think that is just a simple matter, that you could come to a preaching and leave it just as you please, but Peter says to these persons, "ye denied the holy and righteous one". So it may be that you have heard the preaching, have known something too of the prompting of the Spirit of God, and gone out unresponsive to those pipings of divine grace. It would mean what Peter says, that you have denied Him.

He says in the third section, that ye have rejected Him. That is even more solemn. But it brings every man into the presence of God. It is not only the Jew that stands guilty of having crucified Jesus, but the nations as well as Israel were gathered together at the cross of Jesus: The inscription on that cross was not only in Hebrew but also Greek and Roman when they crucified the Lord of glory. Peter brings that home to these persons, and while I would not dwell on it at the moment, it brings every man into a place of responsibility, every person who hears the glad tidings, man, woman, boy or girl, they stand in a place of responsibility in relation to God who has proclaimed a dispensation of blessing.

But Peter goes into much more. While he brings home to them their guilt, he brings home so beautifully the resources and wealth of a Saviour God who would have all men to be saved. You may have thought that there would have been a better three thousand persons to bless than those, but God took advantage of that most guilty audience to show the resources of His love

and grace and the fulness of the delight that He had found in Jesus. That is what Peter brings out in these preachings, that the foundation of the whole dispensation of blessing rests on the fact that God has glorified His servant Jesus. That is why it continues until today. The guilt of man may well have caused God to close the books, He may well have said, One thousand years is enough, but here we have come to almost two thousand years and the books are still open, the offer of pardon and mercy is still flowing in all its fulness, because God has glorified His servant Jesus. What delight heaven has found in Christ. If man rejected Him, crucified and delivered Him up, heaven has found its full delight in a Man who here on earth glorified God. Those precious words are uttered from His own lips, "I have glorified thee on the earth". Peter says here "God has glorified his servant Jesus". What better approbation could there be of the service of Jesus than that God has glorified Him. Think of God taking account of His servant Jesus before He was in public service. If it required God in His wisdom to bring men from the east to proclaim His incoming, He did that. Bringing out again the unresponsiveness of the Jew to the circumstances in which Christ came. These men proclaim to them that there was One who was born the king of the Jews. The angels could not contain themselves, as they saw for the first time on this sin-stained universe, one who was holy—"that holy thing born". Born, come into man's circumstances, how the whole heavenly host was vibrant as those heavenly praises were sung. Mr Darby says—

> More just those acclamations
> Than when the heavenly band
> Chanted earth's deep foundations,
> Just laid by God's right hand.
>
> ('The Man of Sorrows' (1867))

They sang when the earth was created, but how sweet the song, how rich the praise, when they saw the Lord of glory lying in a manger. They could not contain themselves. God's Servant. That was what He came to do, to serve God. You say, Did He not come to serve men? True He did. I may say that is the secondary side of His service. Many would think it was the primary point of His service that He came to heal, He came to bless—true—and

how blessed that is from our side, but the primary point of His service was that He came to glorify God. He came here to lay a righteous basis for a dispensation of blessing. He was here in the lowly conditions of manhood, working as men worked, dressing as men dressed, feeling hunger as men felt it, touching humanity in all its facets, a man, truly a man, and yet He glorified God in the circumstances of humanity. Oh how heaven took account of every moment of that pathway of Jesus, day and night. The angels too were full of wonderment, as they saw Him, tempted of Satan—what that must have been to heaven, a Man here, tempted of Satan, forty days and forty nights when Satan harnessed every resource and every armament in his armoury against God's servant Jesus, and he left Him. He had to go out. God was glorified there in a Man, in His pathway at every step, but He was glorified too in His death because He died—

Then onward to the cross,
Through toil and grief and loss,
The Man of sorrows wends His way,
To sheath the judgment sword (Hymn 245)

He sheathed the judgment sword. There God was glorified, that the judgment was exhausted, the judgment that was due to those around, fell upon Jesus.

Peter brings that home to them. He says "ye delivered him up", "ye denied" Him in the presence of Pilate. How the guilt was heaped upon the race. It was not only that they denied and delivered Him up but the very man to whom they delivered Him up, Pilate, said "I find no fault whatever in him". O my friend, think of justice being miscarried as never before. They put Him up to the judge, but would they accept the judge's verdict? The verdict was "I find no fault whatever in Him". Peter says he had judged that He should be let go. Yet the answer to those words of Pilate was "Crucify, crucify him". What a moment in the history of time when the very judge under God's hand says, I find no fault in Him whatever. Not from one examination. You may say there was another court of appeal and the verdict was the same. How thoroughly He was examined, Pilate, Herod, the priests, the Sadducees; just like the offerings, all laid bare and there the perfection coming out in every detail—I find no fault in

Him whatever. That was the Man who bore the judgment sword. That was the Man who stood in your place and mine. Peter says to these persons, 'he stood in your place'. You could have well understood it if God had come out in judgment in those days in Jerusalem. He had demonstrated His grace in the pathway of Jesus and man's answer was, crucify Him. How God would have been justified in coming out in judgment upon them. But no, Oh the marvel of His love! The triumph of His mercy, the judgment fell where it could be borne. Had it fallen upon man, it would have been the end of time. Had the judgment fallen upon those around, it would have been eternal damnation. God would have been denied, may I say respectfully, the opportunity of opening the windows of heaven, in a dispensation of blessing.

But the judgment fell where it could be borne, it fell upon Jesus, His holy servant, and there in His death, as never before, He glorified God, as He bore the judgment due to you and me and in the bearing of it, hear this cry—"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do". Words that have rung through the history of time, words that have been heard and answered in heaven, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do". Here is the answer to that cry that God not only forgave them, but He demonstrated it in giving forgiveness to three thousand souls at one preaching. Oh the wonder of divine love! Oh the matchless superiority of divine grace, that the judgment having been borne, He has come out in blessing. But how severe was that judgment! The depths that the Saviour tasted, the distance to which He went that that judgment should be thoroughly met. Peter speaks in this section about their sins being blotted out. That is how God has come in in this dispensation of blessing, that He is prepared to blot out. Things blotted out are truly gone, you cannot see the marks, it is blotted out, removed for ever from His presence. God is prepared to blot them out. That is what Peter is saying in the preaching, but what a distance, what a work that involved for Jesus. It involved not only the cross, it involved that He died, it involved that He was buried.

Paul says it very briefly, "he died for our sins, and he was buried", and "he was raised". There is the gospel in a nutshell. But O what it meant for Jesus, the distance to which He went—that He died and He was buried. It is something that is

unfathomable, the burial of Jesus. Why should He be there for three days and three nights. In three hours on the cross, from one point of view, He bore the judgment that was poured out. Yet, there He is three days and three nights. He felt it. You say He was dead—yes, He was dead—but He felt the fact anticipatively, because He said, "the Son of Man must be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth". He felt it at least anticipatively, that He was going into that distance, God's servant. What it must have been to heaven, after those thirty-three and a half years of life upon this earth, that there should then be three days and three nights, that He was in the distance.

That is how far He has gone. But He has been raised. That is what Peter brings home in these preachings, that He has been raised. Blessed be His Name, the work has been fully accomplished. The resurrection of Jesus is showing that God has been fully satisfied in His Holy Servant Jesus. He not only raised Him, in answer to the work that He took upon Him, but He has glorified Him. That is where the glad tidings is coming from tonight. It is where the blessing is coming from for you tonight, from the glory, God has given Him a Name above every name. Peter says here, "there is no other name". There is a hymn that says—

Join all the glorious names,
Of wisdom, love and power
That mortals ever knew, that angels ever bore,
All are too mean to speak His worth,
Too mean to set the Saviour forth.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

He has a Name that is above every name. That is the Name that is proclaimed in the preaching.

Peter says—"God has made him both Lord and Christ". He has put Him in a position of supreme authority, but too in an unassailable position of blessing. For Christ is the great Blesser, the Christ is the One who is going to bring in a whole millennium of blessing for Israel and for men. He says "God has made him, whom ye have crucified"—there could be no greater contrasts. Men put Him on a cross, God has made Him Lord and Christ.

May I ask, is He Lord to you, has He become your Lord, is He the One to whom you have bowed the knee in full allegiance? Is He the One that you make the resource for the circumstances of your life? Peter does not leave them without a sense of guilt. But the preaching would not be a preaching if it did not bring home the infinite resources to bless; however great the guilt, the resources of divine love are more than equal to it.

It is a wonderful thing—two chapters at least in the Bible about this lame man being blessed. Not many persons have two chapters about them. He was an insignificant beggar, a man that was an outcast of society, but the Spirit of God takes these two chapters to demonstrate the resource of divine love to reach those outcasts. There are two very fine things said about him, it says "he was there in complete soundness", then it says too "he was sound in body". It is what the gospel would bring you into complete salvation—one day there begging alms at the gate of the temple, and perhaps just a few minutes after, he is walking and leaping and praising God. He confounds Jerusalem, really, the Pharisees, and the priests: those who looked after the temple and all its ordinances, they were confounded, that a man that had been lame for forty years was there walking, leaping and praising God. Oh the power of the Name of Jesus available tonight to meet and to enter into the very recesses of the human heart, that men may be set up in complete soundness. Complete soundness would involve that not only your sins are forgiven, but the man was not only made to walk, but he was leaping and praising God. So the gospel goes all the way. You may not embrace the fulness of it, you may not even be prepared to enter into the fulness of it, but God from His side is coming out in His blessing, that you may come into the fulness of what the glad tidings would set you up in. The man is set up: as Peter says, "complete soundness in the presence of you all". But then he says more, he goes on to speak of Jesus being the corner stone—"Jesus the Nazaræan, whom ye have crucified, whom God has raised ... this man stands here before you sound in body". Some persons whom you meet are not just too sound. I would not say that they were not Christians exactly, but they have been brought up under a teaching that says they can be saved today and lost tomorrow; they are not completely sound. There are other persons whom I

know who are undoubtedly Christians, and yet they would live their lives in things that are not pleasing to God; they are not completely sound. The gospel is coming out that you may be there completely sound, "sound in body". It is very fine to meet somebody who is sound. You speak to them, you get a good echo, you get a good response—others say, We will try, I mean some day to give my life to Jesus, I know Him as my Saviour, I mean some day to be more committed. You meet these persons and most of us, may be all of us, are in that category in some way, but the gospel is preached to make us completely sound. That, my friend, comes about through coming to the Corner-stone. "He is the stone which has been set at nought by you"—he is not saying now that they have crucified Him, but he is saying that you did not appreciate Jesus. That is what he is coming down to in the preaching. Oh the grace of the preachings that it does not bring home the guilt that is beyond what is reasonable. He says—"He is the stone which has been set at nought". Who is there that has not set at nought the Lord Jesus? But he is saying that if you have done that, God has made Him the Corner-stone, and for this man, for Peter's audience, He is saying that He wants to be the corner-stone of your life. God has made Him the corner-stone. I do not know much about building, but the corner-stone is there as a distinctive feature of the building; it gives it character and what character Christ has given to this whole dispensation! Peter is appealing that you who have gone on perhaps up until today without giving Him His true place that you make Him the corner-stone of your life. You the builders, He has become the Comer-stone. Peter makes a good deal more of that when He writes to, perhaps, some of these same persons later on, he makes a good deal of the building and the corner-stone. The corner-stone is something to attract your heart that it may become the dominant feature in your life. Most of us spend a good deal of time when we are not regulated by the Corner-stone, but the appeal would be to make Him the Corner-stone, the pivotal feature of your life, that like the man here we may be fully in the testimony of our Lord in complete soundness, for our own joy and blessing but too for God's praise and glory.

BIRMINGHAM

9th November 1997

THE PRESENT POSITION AND OCCUPATION OF CHRIST

1 Peter 3: 22
Hebrews 9: 24
Ephesians 1: 22, 23
John 14: 2, 3

In the book of Exodus, when Moses was on the mountain for forty days, the people said, We do not know what has become of him. That largely is the position abroad today, the world does not know what has become of Jesus. They celebrate occasions such as His birth and His death; some speak about the Lord, comparing Him with others; we find in books some reference to His miracles, and other remarks; but largely they do not know what has become of Him.

I would like to speak from these scriptures of His present position and occupation. The bride in the Song of Songs could tell you what happened to her beloved. She was asked, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved ...?", SofS 5: 9. That question is very appropriate today. What is the difference between Jesus and Mohammed and others? Now she would tell you, among other things, "His mouth is most sweet", v 16. She knew living communications. She knew where He was when He went to His garden. She knew just where He was because she was in living touch with Him. I would like to encourage our hearts as to the place that Jesus fills above; the place that He has been given, that no other will have or share either. Many glories He will share, but He has a place in heaven that is His and His alone. The Father loves the Son and has given all things to be in His hand.

Peter was writing to persons who had lost a lot. We speak about sufferings, breakdown and so on, but he was writing to persons who knew that in a far deeper way than we do; they had been driven out of their country and may well have been despondent. Peter is writing to them about the resurrection of Jesus, saying, "who is at the right hand of God,

gone into heaven". He has gone in in the right and glory of His Person, but He is gone in too on the ground of a work completed. Peter says about Him elsewhere, "whom heaven indeed must receive", Acts 3: 21. How welcome He was there! He is at the right hand of God, "angels and authorities and powers being subjected to him". That is what marks the present day, however fearsome these authorities may appear, whatever power they may take to themselves, there is One who is above them all. What a comfort to our hearts! What a comfort to these sorrowing saints who were being persecuted, that there was a Man in heaven whom they knew. Jesus Christ, angels, authorities and powers being subjected to Him.

Now this was no idle story to Peter. Had he not been in prison? The authorities were against him, but an angel opened the gates, smote his side, and said to Peter "follow me", Acts 12: 8. All the forces that men could command at that time were harnessed there against Peter, as they had been against Christ. Now Christ is at the right hand of God, acting from the place that He has in heaven to deliver His servant, to bring him out because he was needed in the testimony. So he writes these words from his experience, "angels and authorities and powers being subjected to him". That is what reigns in the present day, the authorities are subjected to Christ, what a rest to our souls. Whatever powers they may usurp or claim, their power and authority is limited. Christ at the right hand of God is above all these things.

John too had a view of Him like that in the Revelation; Christ there controlling every authority and every power, presenting Himself to John as the One who had the keys of death and of hades. What a thing death is as it comes near to us, but the keys are in His hand. The Man who bore our sins on the cross, the Man who was here in lowly grace, despised by men, He has the keys of death and of hades; they are under His control. It says too, "he set his right foot on the sea, and the left upon the earth" (Rev 10: 2), the whole dominion under His power and authority. If you read through Revelation you can see the authorities of darkness are not let loose; one seal is opened after another, and everything is in perfect control, under the authority and power of Jesus Christ who has gone into

heaven. You can understand John being restful as he had that vision, seeing Christ controlling these authorities. One time one power may be used, but its power is limited, and under God's will that power is set aside, and another power is used. Christ is in control of these authorities. We can see how some powers have risen and fallen in the history of man; these empires in Daniel how they rise and fall, and so it will be as time goes on, but eventually they will all be put in their place. He will bring everything into subjection.

In the meantime, it is for the assurance of the saints that Peter is writing this. The Lord is for us and He has control of our circumstances; He may allow or use them to drive us closer to Himself; He would have us take His yoke upon us, to come to Him and learn from Him. He may order circumstances in your life to do that. In the course of history, we can see, when there has been persecution of the saints, how they have been driven closer to Him, and a brighter testimony has shone out. Think of the testimony of the martyrs, when the Lord allowed persecution by the authorities and it brought out something of the testimony of Jesus. How beautifully so! He may allow these things in your personal circumstances. But Peter would assure our hearts afresh as to these authorities, their powers are limited; Christ is above them all, and He is above them all in consideration for His saints.

In Hebrews He has not only gone into heaven in control of these powers but He has gone "into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God". If the scripture had stopped there it would have been very blessed, but it adds, "for us"—how precious! Think of Him going in on your account and mine. I can understand Him going in in the glory and majesty of His Person, but think of Him going in "to appear before the face of God for us". These words are very beautiful, "into heaven itself". He has gone to a place that He fills, great antitype of the holy of holies as these Jews would understand, but He has gone in as a Man. How blessed to think of that Man in heaven—"for us". Maybe you are not so bright today as you were another day, maybe you are brighter today than you were another day, but Christ appearing before the face of God for you never changes.

What a favour to enjoy to retire into, that whatever your state or condition (and the enemy may engage you with that) here is a verse to quote to him. I believe it is right to do so, because the enemy is a very real one, he brings challenges into your heart, as he does to mine, and it is good to quote scripture to him as the Lord quoted scripture to the devil. This verse would be one to quote as he brings these things to bear upon us in our histories. There is a Man in heaven whom I know, who loves me, and He is there before the face of God for me. It speaks of Satan being an accuser of the brethren, but he never reaches in this far. He has his own limited sphere, and he works and sows discord and tries to bring confusion among the saints, but he never gets in here. How blessed to think of Christ's present occupation before the face of God! Do you know what has become of Him? Do you know Him there for you? Do you know the love that represents you before the face of God? Think of your name on that breastplate! He says to the disciples to rejoice that their names were written in heaven. You could never write your own name there, but there He is with your name on His heart—"now to appear before the face of God for us". I say again, that is never to be changed.

May our hearts rest in it in the troublesome days that we are in. There is a Man there, the Son of man in all His glory, before the face of God. In the typical scriptures, we have the table of shewbread with two rows of six loaves, representing the saints before God, supported by Christ. That is your present place. It is not something only to look forward to in a day to come when you will be there in actuality, but now in the present time He has gone into heaven itself. Look at that word "now"—"now to appear before the face of God". Do you know a God like that? Do you know a Father like that? He does not raise questions but looks on you with cloudless favour as you are there before Him in Christ. That is the place of every believer in Christ, and Christ is there for every believer. What a triumph it brings into any circumstances of the testimony when we are living in the light of the place of favour that we have before God in Christ.

The scripture speaks too in Hebrews of being there as our Forerunner. Soon we shall be there in actuality, but now, while in the wilderness circumstances. He is there as our great Forerunner. He has opened a door in His going in, and He has opened up the home of love. Do you know what it is to explore the realm of love where He has gone for us? Think of the way He spoke to the disciples in John 17! Written over that chapter is, Christ's place is our place. He is there for us. He spoke to the Father about those who were left in the world, saying, "I sanctify myself for them", John 17: 19. It was that they should be maintained in the freshness and the glory of their place above.

Where we read in Ephesians, it says, "and gave him to be head over all things to the assembly, which is his body". What service is going on towards His assembly! The head is the great source of supply, and He is serving as Head to sustain us with resources that are to be found in Him. Do you refer to Him in that capacity, Head over all things? There is not a thing that He cannot meet.

What resources He has and they are exercised today towards the assembly. He will soon take up other matters, but His great occupation today is as "head over all things to the assembly, which is his body". What resources and wealth are flowing from the Head to the body in view of Christ being in expression. It is wonderful to see, in some measure, the Man above reflected in His body down here.

In a day to come, the graces of Christ will be displayed to a wondering universe through the assembly. When Israel sees what has been formed in the assembly through the operations of the Head, they will be filled with wonderment. They will see a glory that they had never seen before; a glory of which they could have had something. It says that Israel had the glory, the promises, the covenants; but it will then all be seen in the assembly, His fulness, as deriving from the Head. But then it is to be known by us, individually, as we are part of this vessel, through divine grace, if we have been brought to know Christ as our Saviour, and have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, we

are to come into the wealth that is flowing from the Head to the assembly. The hymn-writer says—

> Great source of wisdom, power and food,
> All riches from Thee flow. (Hymn 199)

Now that is all available for us as part of this glorious vessel. How should we be put to the wall? How should there be matters that are unresolved that we are unable to meet? It is His prime occupation today, to serve the saints in His love with the resources of wisdom that are needed. It says about Him, "Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness, and redemption", 1 Cor 1: 30. He was that for Corinth; as Paul was saying. There you are content with something far short of assembly life, while so much is available for you in Christ, wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness, and redemption. These things cover whatever we may need at any time, He has been made that to us. Paul would have the Corinthians to feed on Christ, as Israel did when they came into Canaan and ate of the old corn of the land. What I am speaking of is the old corn of the land. It is very blessed to know Christ in the circumstances of the wilderness pathway, to learn how He was in those circumstances is food for our daily life. When they came into the land the manna ceased, and they ate the old corn of the land. That is to know Christ in His own domain, to feed on Him now in the way that He is serving His assembly. The manna had to be gathered daily, but the old corn of the land was there from the year before; the land was full of it. As you go into these courts above, you find that Christ Jesus is everywhere, in His own domain, in His own glory. He is no longer having to take up the matter of sins or sin; no longer having to meet the liabilities of all that has come into the race; but there He is in His own glory and personal worth as the food for the saints.

To the overcomer at Ephesus He says, "I will give to him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God", Rev 2: 7. What a food for our souls! What a food, in its plenitude, to be eaten, varied fruits of richest flavour, every month yielding something fresh, something precious, there to sustain the saints. That all comes into this—"and gave him to be head over

all things to the assembly, which is his body". How He loves it! He said to Saul on that Damascus road, "why dost thou persecute me?", Acts 9: 4. There you see the Lord defending His body. What an impression Saul had about it from those saints in Damascus. It seemed as if there was nothing going to protect them, did it not? Saul had letters from the high priest, but there was the Head operating. He stops Saul from going further, saying, "why dost thou persecute me?"—How He loved those few saints in Damascus. How He loves His body, nourishing and cherishing it, what a service He is carrying on today! That is a view of Christ where He has gone. It is a view that is to be known by the saints, in their experience and in the circumstances of life today.

John, I think, enjoyed it; he lived in that area, and he writes these words with fresh experience in his soul. Maybe he did not understand them fully when he heard them from the lips of Jesus at first, but when he wrote his gospel they must have had wonderful meaning as he wrote them down. It says, "In my Father's house there are many abodes; were it not so, I had told you". There is a wonderful touch of His confidence in those words. He would not keep anything back from His loved ones; He would not deceive them by nice platitudes nor lead them astray by strange words. He says, "In my Father's house there are many abodes; were it not so, I had told you", and because of the fact of it being so He says, I am going to tell you more, "I go to prepare you a place", that is, by His going into heaven now to appear before the face of God for us. That is our place. We are here in these circumstances today as away from home; soon we shall be home in actuality. The hymn says—

> And can we call our home
> Our Father's house on high? (Hymn 64)

Is that your home? If someone asked you to describe your home, where would it be? Well, we would have a lot of descriptions, but here is John's home. It has been true too about others in the testimony. Mr Darby, a man in flesh and blood condition like you and I are in, wrote—

And oh! how all that eye can see
To others now belongs!
The eternal home's so nigh to me—
My soul's eternal songs. ('The Call' (1832))

You can see in his writings that he had a sense of his place above. He had troubles with his eyes, troubles in his body, he knew what it was to be tossed in the storm on the sea, but he had a rest above—

Rest of the saints above,
Jerusalem of God! (Hymn 74)

Such men were not apostles, but men who were in the practical circumstances of life that we are in, but they lived in the sense that they had a home above and so could write about it.

So the Lord here is encouraging the saints. He says, "for I go to prepare you a place; and if I go and shall prepare you a place, I am coming again and shall receive you to myself". Not only to a place, but, "receive you to myself"; what a reception it will be! How we look forward to being folded in His arms; to the embrace of His love in all its blessed sweetness. We know where He has gone, but He says, "that where I am ye also may be". My friend, He does not want to be in heaven without you. He will not be content until He has the whole ransomed host in heaven with Him. The fact that He has gone in has assured our place for all eternity. What a place it will be to be in heaven; with those tears wiped away, those sorrows for ever gone. Not only to be in the place, but He says, "and shall receive you to myself".

May these words encourage our hearts to know something about Him where He is. Paul in writing to the Philippians says, "our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens". I believe it was true of them that they were drawing their resources from the commonwealth above, and so defeating all the resources of man's imagination and hatred, and the devil's resources too against the brethren. May our hearts be encouraged to draw from it for Christ's Name's sake.

DUNDEE

6th December 1997

WHAT GOD HAS PREPARED

2 Corinthians 5: 18-21
Romans 3: 21-26; 5: 1, 9-11
2 Samuel 9: 1-2, 13

I count on the service of the Spirit at this time to bring into our hearts something of the great things that God has prepared for them that love Him. He has operated from His own side when all was lost, when man had forfeited everything. God gave man time but then came in Himself with the resources of His love to provide everything for man, in a Man who was able to do it, blessed be His Name! "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself", and He established a righteous basis so that He was able to operate in blessing. It says, "not imputing their trespasses", KJV. Oh how wonderful! What guilt lay on man—had not the law proved it? The law had but magnified how guilty man was, but God coming in in Christ said, as it were, I will set that aside for the moment. The Lord did not raise the law with men; He was not imputing their trespasses. Think of that scene in Simon the Pharisee's house. It says, "he forgave both of them their debt", Luke 7: 42. As sent He said, "He has anointed me to preach to captives deliverance, and to the blind sight, to send forth the crushed delivered", Luke 4: 18. Whatever state was there, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. What a heart He had! Nothing of all that had come in in man's history turned Him away, but He came in a Man so approachable, who came so near to the circumstances in which men lived to bring men back to Himself, whoever they were. Luke loves to record the outcasts of society, and God in Christ bringing them back to enjoy the resources of His love, and that is still going on. God was in Christ: that was who was there in spite of what they said about Him. ln disdain they said, "Is not this the son of the carpenter?" Matt 13: 55. They would mock who He was because of the lowliness that was there, but yet God was there, my friend, and that was irrefutable. In spite of the circumstances and the surroundings God was in Christ operating by Himself on His own behalf irrespective of what was found in humanity. This is what the glad tidings brings. It brings what is needed into the circumstances of the present day, and I pray that the Spirit of

God will bring something into your heart of the resources of His love to be enshrined in your affections, the great things that He has prepared and would bring you into. He comes in Himself from His own side to do things, I may say, in His majesty. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their offences". As I have said already, He was there to dispense, not to receive, and how richly those resources flowed when He was here! Oh what a matter that God came in in such a way introducing this great dispensation of blessing to which we belong that has gone on for nearly two thousand years, unfolding as it has gone on the great blessings that God has in Christ for humanity!

In what we have read here in Corinthians it is presented that God has operated in reconciliation, that however great the distance He has come in to remove it, and when Jesus was here, God found a spot in Him where He was pleased to dwell. He stood out from the race, so much so that the heavens were opened upon Him declaring who He was. There was heaven expressing its pleasure in Christ here with all the grace and all the resources that man needed to bring him back. How attractive He was, to heaven at least, and to some others who found everything met as they came to Christ. It says, "him who knew not sin". If the work of reconciliation was to be effected it required that He, my friend, as He alone could, took upon Himself the whole question of sin and sins. He did not know sin, that is why as we read in some of those readings earlier His holy soul shrank from it. It was foreign to Him, yet how His feelings were moved as He saw it all around Him. "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us". There is God acting to establish the work of reconciliation immutably in the death of His Son, taking away what had come into the race. Can you fathom it, my friend? There is the way God has acted to establish a basis in righteousness, to come out in the blessings of His love to fill your heart and to bring you to be at rest and at home in His house. That is what God has in mind in the glad tidings, but that required a basis in righteousness and it meant that the Holy One in whom God was operating when here was made sin for us. See the love of God in that, that He should reach out to those rebels, that He should reach out to those who were afar off, and He has made Him sin

for us, that we might become God's righteousness in Him. What thoughts God has for you, my friend, far greater thoughts than you can ever conceive about yourself! God wants you not only to be forgiven but He wants you to be God's righteousness in Him. What a wonderful plan God has in His mind, what wonderful thoughts He has for you, that He wants to look upon you, and what will He see? He will see Christ. I think that is what it would imply. That is God's thought for humanity, that He can look on men and see them clothed in all the precious worth of His beloved Son; but if that was to be, His Son had to be made sin for us, to take away from God's sight all that we were and the whole principle of sin in which man lives. He measured it and He met it in the death of Jesus. "Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us". That meant—we were speaking about it in those readings and we can never speak about it except worshipfully and in very measured terms—it meant that He was forsaken, forsaken for us. What a God, that He would spare you and spare me, guilty sinners, and forsake His own Son as He took our place. It is what the race should have been, it is what you and I would have been as of Adam's race without God and without Christ, having no hope, but God forsook His Son. I often think of that scene in Jerusalem, Christ on the cross and God coming in in blessing on all around. If ever the world was ripe for judgment it was when they crucified the Lord of glory, but what did God do? In a few days He blessed three thousand souls. This is the kind of God He is. He could do it in righteousness because sin and all that had come into the race was met on the cross in the forsaking of Jesus. But ah! my friend, there was more to it than that. It says, "that Christ died for our sins ... and that he was buried, and that he was raised the third day" (1 Cor 15: 3, 4)—glorious matter! The work was completed to God's eternal glory and praise and satisfaction, completed in finality. He was forsaken of God, He died, but He who bore our sins was buried and was raised by the glory of the Father that a new day might dawn, a day of blessing, a day, my friend, when forgiveness is preached in the name of Jesus. What a day it has been! Have you started to enjoy the blessings of it? To the woman we spoke of in Luke in Simon's house He says, "Thy sins are forgiven", chap 7: 48. That is the first step, that God, because of what He has established in righteousness in the death and rising of Jesus, is

able to come out in forgiveness to those who put their faith in Jesus.

I just want to speak of some of these steps of blessing. Romans brings us into it. If in Corinthians where we read God was acting on His own side and in His own way to establish the matter, we see in these verses I have read in Romans how the believer can come into the blessings of the house through being justified by faith in Jesus. These things are wonderful; you have heard them often. Have you put your faith in the Lord Jesus? You have heard the story of God's boundless love, everyone in this room has many, many times. My friend, I ask you again, Have you changed your man? We used to hear that expression often. You see that in the scripture we read in Romans, where all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That man can never be reconciled, nor can ever come into the blessings of God's house, but by putting your faith in Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and in the work that He has done, your sins can be forgiven, you can be justified through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the things God has come out with, because through the death and rising of Jesus God has come out with the wealth of His house. He is proclaiming it tonight in the gospel for faith that you come in to enjoy the blessed fulness He has in mind for you. So it says now the righteousness of God is manifested. He is perfectly right in doing it. Man's righteousness is as filthy rags and, my friend, all that you can do is of no avail in God's sight, of no avail whatever, but righteousness of God is manifested, proclaimed in the gospel, the righteousness of God that He has condemned sin in His Son, He has made Him to be sin who knew not sin for us. There God established His righteousness to come out to forgive the sinner. Nay, more than that, friend, He established His right to justify the ungodly, persons who put their faith and trust in Jesus. What does it mean? It means, my friend, that God has cleared the whole matter completely, righteously, and as you put your faith in Jesus God looks on you as in Christ, He looks on you as belonging to that family of faith. What a family they are! Are you one of them, are you one of those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus, seeing there was no hope outside of the Man that God has brought in? God says here that He would justify him

that is of the faith of Jesus. It is a very fine thing to have a sense that you are justified. We may speak in more detail about it in Mephibosheth, but there it is, God has operated to bring you on to entirely new ground, and He is just in showing forth His righteousness. I want to emphasise that because you can never enjoy being justified if you do not see that God has been perfectly right in doing it, because He has paid the debt to the glory of His own throne and majesty, so that He is perfectly just in justifying those who put their faith in Jesus. I say again, Have you changed your man? Have you still faith in the man who can do works, have you still some hope that things will come right some day? My friend, I appeal to you tonight to forsake the path of man's independency and scheming and put your faith and trust in what the Lord Jesus has done. "That he should be just, and justify him that is of the faith of Jesus". He does this individually, each person is justified individually. God would speak to you tonight where you are, that you as an individual may come to know what it is to be justified in the sight of God. It says here that having been justified we have peace with God. I know of no greater thing than to be at peace with God. Think of the world we are in, think of the uncertainties of life, of all that lies ahead upon humanity, terrible things, but having been justified on the principle of faith we have peace with God. You think of Martin Luther, and the great forces and power of Rome that were against him: he says, Here I stand. There was a man who knew that if Rome would condemn him, God would justify him. "Who is he that condemns?", Rom 8: 34. It is God who justifies and He is perfectly righteous in doing it. I ask again, Have you put your faith in the finished work of Jesus? It says here, "Therefore having been justified on the principle of faith, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ". See how that name comes into all these scriptures. It is not in a creed, it is not in a text, it is in a Man, "through our Lord Jesus Christ", the Man of God's appointing, the Man of God's choice, the Man who could say while here on this earth, "l have glorified thee on the earth", John 17: 4. ln answer to that God has glorified Him and given Him a name and preached salvation in no other name so that those who put their faith in Him have "peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ". The hymn writer says—

I stand upon His merit,
I know no other stand

Anne R Cousin (1824-1906)

—that is one justified. Let persons accuse, let the accuser of the brethren bring up matters to you, my friend, as he will—I am justified through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, we are not justified now fully, or for things here, but the full extent of it will be that we will be raised from the dead. God is going to raise that whole glorious company who have been justified through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So it goes on here: "having been now justified in the power of his blood". It is irrevocable, you know, the power of the blood which has met God's holy throne; and it has met my conscience too. It has met all that can come up in my history, "the power of his blood". God speaks about the blood in these passages as having met His eye and at the mercy-seat the sinner is standing upon it. There it is, sprinkled once upon the mercy seat meeting God's eye, but seven times before the mercy-seat that the sinner may stand in God's presence and have his heart opened out to hear the unfoldings of His love. He goes on: "having been now justified in the power of his blood, we shall be saved by him from wrath". My friend, is that all you want? There are many, many persons today and that is all they look for, and there are many gospels preached that stop there, that you will be saved from wrath. It is a marvellous thing, a wonderful matter to be settled about your sins and never to be condemned, but God has far more than that in His heart for you, far, far more. He has come out with these blessings and that is one thing settled, that we will be saved from wrath in the power of His blood, but then it says, "For if, being enemies, we have been reconciled to God through the death of his Son". Reconciliation, you know, is something more. It brings you in to be in the enjoyment of God's glorious thoughts. The younger son in Luke 15 is often spoken about; you see those steps that he took, you see him coming into some sense of being justified. The Father came out to do it, as He has come out today in the gospel. He has come out with the best robe, the ring and the sandals to clothe the younger son. There he is being reconciled, being made fit for the house, not

only saved from wrath. There he is with the robe, the ring and those shoes that he may come inside and enjoy sonship. Now these are the things that God has come out with in the blessings of His love in the gospel. Friend, are you prepared to take the step? Paul pleads in Corinthians where we read, "Be reconciled to God". God has come out with the resources of His love, He has done the work, He has made known His attitude, and in the gospel Paul was saying he was an ambassador and as going on today in the Holy Spirit's grace we beseech, Be reconciled to God. Take the step, my friend, of confessing your sins, take the step of owning how far away you are as away from God and allow the blessings of His love, as faith operates in your heart, to clothe you with justification and reconciliation and the blessings of His house. It says that here: "For if, being enemies, we have been reconciled to God through the death of his Son". How often God brings up the righteous basis for it, the unchallengeable way that God shows that He can do these things for His own glory and for your blessing through the death of His Son. It was all a love matter, my friend. Who could measure what it meant, the death of His Son, save it conveys this, how much He loved men. The kindness and love to man of our Saviour God has appeared. There it is in the death of His Son. "He who, yea, spared not his own Son" that you may come to be reconciled. That means that you are brought in suitability to be in the presence of God through the death of His Son. Let us never, whatever blessings we enjoy and however glorious they are, forget the foundations, and as we think of the way that God has done it, it endears Christ to our hearts. Then it says, "much rather, having been reconciled, we shall be saved in the power of his life". What things God has in mind that you should be here in the enjoyment of! These are glorious matters but they are very feeling matters. They are wonderful things to be enjoyed. May I ask you, Do you enjoy what it is to be justified? You may give out hymns in the meetings, you may say many things, but you will never enjoy being a worshipper until you know what it is to be justified in the power of His blood. Reconciled through the death of His Son: what power it gives to the worship, what praise it invokes in the human heart that God has brought us so near that we may enjoy the fulness of what is in His heart for us. It says, "we shall be saved in the power of his life". That same Man that died for me,

He lives for me. He lives there at God's right hand above. "Saved in the power of his life": one part of it is His priesthood, that He is serving you in daily grace that you may not become enslaved, that you may not become burdened in a world that is without God and without Christ. There are many temptations on us all, on the young people I know, there are many temptations in various phases of the world, but you can be saved in the power of His life. The appeal of sport, the appeal of pleasing yourself with your time, the appeal of business, the appeal that the world would insidiously enslave you in its system—there is a Man at God's right hand above to save you from being ensnared in the bondage of this world. Blessed be His Name, you will saved in the power of His life. Friend, are you taking this step tonight? Are you going to allow the wealth of God's love to come into your heart, to respond to the appeals of His grace that He would set you up here in the body that you are in, in the circumstances that you are in, saved in the power of His life, a life that can never be assailed as He is there at God's right hand above serving you in all your weakness? Do not be afraid to speak to Him about your problems, for that is how salvation and the power of His life comes in. Do not be afraid to speak to Him when you are tempted by the world of sport, or commerce, or whatever. He will put His hand upon you and He will say, My son, I have something better for you. Listen to Me, I have something better to bring you into. And so Mephibosheth did that.

Mephibosheth was one who was there an outcast of society. The tribes were coming up to David, and he was not able, for he was lame, a son of Saul. You say it would not have mattered. Friend, you may think at times, what do I matter? Now God is sending out the appeal of His grace to you where you are, in Lodebar or wherever you are tonight. David says, "ls there yet any that is left?" Is there one still in this room that has not come into the joy of Christ on the throne? It says he sent and fetched him, and what did he do? He gave him the blessings of his house. Mephibosheth there says, I am but a dead dog. I think you can see in Mephibosheth's life a man who was justified. He was misrepresented, persons told lies about him, but he says, What does that matter?—

I stand upon His merit,
I know no other stand.

What does it matter what Ziba said about him, or how he maligned him, or would seek to deceive him? He says, My lord the king. There was a man who was reconciled, who was justified. He was justified as he came by the grace that shone in David, and there David brings him into all the wealth of his house, he brings him in to eat at his table as one of the king's sons, perfectly suitable. If you went into that room you could not have told which was a natural son of David or Mephibosheth: he was there as one of the king's sons. He had the same robe, he had the same blessings, he had the same meals at the table: there was the wealth that he was brought into. We sang this morning—

Brought to rest within the circle
Where love's treasures are displayed.

(Hymn 136)

Think of God bringing us into His house to display His blessings. Think of the table being set, forgiveness, justification, reconciliation all spread on the table, and that is only the start of the meal. Think of God's house and all the wealth that is coming into that table, all the dishes that were carried in and Mephibosheth enjoying them all, eating them as one of the king's sons. My friend, I ask you, is that your happy portion, settled peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ? You see Mephibosheth later on. It says he had neither trimmed his beard nor washed his clothes during the time of David's rejection. That was him in the world, that was Mephibosheth in the circumstances of reproach. He identified himself with an absent lord because he enjoyed justification and reconciliation and sonship. He says, David is not here, it is not the time for me spreading myself. Every man that looked at Mephibosheth would see that he was loyal to an absent lord, he was waiting for him to come again in peace. But when he came in he took those clothes away. You do not bring these clothes to the meeting. These are the clothes outside, the way we conduct our lives as justified persons; he neither washed his clothes nor trimmed his beard. He walked in a separate path and that is salvation for us,

society would not want us. They would not want Mephibosheth, he would always be speaking about his absent lord, and they would not want him. But there as the king comes in peace, he comes into the king's arrangements. He comes there ready for when David comes, to eat at the table, which is like the local meeting. As the Lord comes in there, he finds a company of justified reconciled persons who are enjoying what it is to eat at the king's table. May we be encouraged, every one of us, to take these steps in faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may eat at the King's table as one of His sons. For our blessing? —Yes, but for God's glory and praise. What a joy God has in seeing those persons eating together in those glorious circumstances. Think of Him coming in, in the wealth of His love and enjoying their company. This is what reconciliation has in mind, not only that you are blessed, set up before God, but that God can enjoy your company. Do you ever think of that? Do you ever give Him some of your time, do you ever give Him some of your company, do you ever tell Him how glad you are that in His sovereign mercy He reached out to you, to justify an ungodly far-off sinner? He loves to hear you speak to Him about the greatness of His love. You say you are busy, but it does not take moments to lift your heart up to God and praise Him for the resources and richness of His love, and so God has His portion too. He has His portion in His people. He will soon have it eternally when the whole praising company are there in heavenly circumstances praising the glory of His grace, but may it flood our hearts tonight for your blessing. Make sure it is yours tonight, my friend, make sure you do not miss out on the great wealth and blessings that God has that you should be justified, reconciled and find what it is to be here as one of the king's sons. May it be so, for His glory.

GLASGOW

August 1998

at three-day meetings with Mr Jim D Gray

THE IMMINENCE OF THE LORD'S COMING

Luke 12: 34-38; 19: 11-13

We were reading recently in Proverbs 7 of the strange woman who said that her husband had gone a long journey and would not be back until full moon. It impressed on me the need for keeping before us the imminence of the Lord's return. If she had been expecting him soon, she would not have done the things she did. That is really what has happened publicly, and is a danger in our own hearts, if we say the Lord delays to come. Peter says, He does not delay. I think it is interesting when the Lord speaks about His going away in these passages, and many others. He also speaks about His coming back. He does not leave a void, but says in the passage we read, "Trade while I am coming". He does not say, 'Trade while I am away', but "while I am coming", as if it is to be the great expectation and hope of our hearts that He is coming. Things here are not to remain as they are for ever. The time of His absence is marked by certain things, but they will change when He comes, and they have already changed in the hearts of believers who expect His coming. It alters our outlook on things here, our conduct, our occupation, and gives a hope that sustains us in the darkest of pressures. Peter says, "as ye wait for these things, be diligent to be found of him in peace", 2 Pet 3: 14.

Certain things are to mark those who look for His coming. We often look for Him to come and change things, but I wonder how much we look for Him, whom having not seen we love; to see the One who has not only died for us, but who serves us in His grace in the circumstances of the path. His service has given us some impression of His grace, of His love, and of His patience, but what it will be to see His face; to see the One who has loved us. The bride, I suppose, in the Canticles, had some sense of it; she was able, in the time when others did not know about Him, to describe Him in His beauty. She could go over the details of His Person, having proved His service of love and grace. It says too that when we see Him we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. We do not yet know that in its fulness, it is not yet manifested to us. But

when we do see Him we shall be changed into His own image, into His own likeness. I think there is a need for that to be held in our affections, dear brethren, that we may not adjust ourselves to the circumstances that are around us.

The Lord, I think, is speaking of that in these passages I have read; He says, "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be", as the hymn-writer puts it—

> 'Tis the treasure we've found in His love
> That has made us now pilgrims below. (Hymn 139)

The expectation of His coming, and what we have found in Him, now guides us in our pathway here. We can see it in Abraham and in many others in Hebrews 11; they travelled the path in the light of another day, and the promises of divine grace shone in their affections. The Lord says to the disciples, "I am coming again and shall receive you to myself" (John 14: 3)—What a promise! In the meantime He has given us the Spirit to antedate it. So He says, "where your treasure is, there also will your heart be". He was encouraging these persons in the waiting time; their loins were to be girded about and their lamps burning. How they would stand out from all that is around with their loins girded; it means that they are preserving what is precious; they are harnessed against what would cause them to stray, their loins girded and lamps burning. It reminds you of the virgins in Matthew 25, and the need for the oil so that the lamps might be burning. That there may be a ready answer, that is what the Lord is speaking about here; He may come at any time, and when He knocks they open to Him immediately. It may stand an application to our meetings, that when He comes there are affections that rise to greet Him. It need not be a long wait. The effect of their loins girded and their lamps burning, in the testimonial position, as faithful and true to another Man, is that when He comes and knocks, they open to Him immediately. Their minds are not filled with all the things and problems of the day.

The result is very affecting, as it says, "he will gird himself and make them recline at table, and coming up will serve them". Do we not have a touch of that at the Supper? Think of the joy the Lord has in coming to such persons of

whom we have read to find them watching. What an expectation for our hearts as we are waiting and watching! The Lord brings in that word a great deal in connection with His absence—watching—because of what is around. When the Lord comes the watching time is over; He is pleased with those who have been watching, and He does not need to raise any questions. He does not need, as in the parable in Matthew 22, to go into the wedding feast and say to the man, "how camest thou in here not having on a wedding garment?", Matt 22: 12. He is ready here to make them recline at table, pleased with what He finds. May we be among those that the Lord has some pleasure in, in the testimonial position, so that He would give us a touch of His love, making us recline at table. The Lord not only said that He was coming for them, but He says, "I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you", John 14: 18. He gives us some taste by the Spirit of this wonderful realm. That woman in Proverbs 7 knew nothing of the Spirit having come to fill out the waiting time; but now the Lord has filled the void by sending the Spirit. So there are persons here in the Spirit's grace with their lamps burning, and He gives such to taste what it is to know His presence.

In the second scripture I read He puts it more on our responsibility. In this parable He gives them all the same; this is not giving one ten and another five, as in Matthew; He has given you the same as me. He has given us all grace; He has given us all the gift of the Spirit; He has given us all enough to fill out the waiting time as overcomers. So He adds this word to them, "Trade while I am coming". I wonder what we are doing with what He has given us?

He has given us more than enough to fill out the dispensation and at the end of it there will be a wonderful vessel seen, that is suited to be with Him in the realm of His own glory. He has given us more than enough for the waiting time, so it is a test to us as to what we are doing with what we are given. The passage is well known and some treat what they have been given differently from others. I would encourage our hearts to value what we have been given; it is more than enough. We feel our circumstances testing; we feel our sorrows, perhaps think we have more than our share of

troubles and sorrows, but the Lord has provided more than enough to meet the circumstances, and He would cause us to trade. Trading involves putting things into circulation; trading makes for increase. That is what made this country great, it was a trading nation, it saw the value of certain goods and it dealt with them. Trading involves turning over your capital; the more it is turned over the more it increases. So that is what happens with these bondman, they traded.

It requires persons with whom to trade. I think the meetings would be that, conversations would be that; trading with what the Lord has given us by impressions of Christ. As you speak to dear believers, how they increase! How your heart is refreshed as you trade with one another with impressions of Christ! It reminds me of Simeon and Anna at the beginning of Luke, they were persons who were trading. The Lord is brought into the temple, and what do we find? A man there looking for the consolation of Israel. In principle, there was a man who was waiting for the Lord's return. We often visualise Simeon with the Lord Jesus in his arms. He says, Let thy servant depart in peace. He had found all that he had been looking for and far more. You say it was only a babe in his arms. No, he says, I see everything completed. He saw the glory of Israel and the light of the Gentiles; he saw God's counsels and purposes that he treasured. He was a man who had read the Old Testament obviously, and he could see it all fulfilled in this Child in his arms. As the Lord comes in this is what He does, He gives us to see things completed; He gives us a sense of divine grace in its fulness. That is what Simeon found. Then there is Anna too, she was trading; it says she spoke of Him to all those who waited for redemption in Jerusalem. These were persons who were trading, and how richly they were blessed. May we each join their ranks, dear brethren, to be among those using what the Lord has given us, that our hearts may be refreshed too. May there be something increased in us personally and in our localities for the Lord's glory and praise.

KIRKCALDY
15th September 1998

THE LORD SPEAKING OF HIMSELF

Revelation 1: 17-19; 3: 20; 22: 16,17, 20

In these passages the Lord Jesus is speaking directly of Himself. Largely, apart from in the gospels, it is others who are speaking about Him, but in these passages He is speaking about Himself. That would give a peculiar appeal to these verses. He is saying things, too, about Himself that perhaps others could hardly say. For example, Peter speaks about Christ as "the morning star" (2 Pet 1: 19), but when He is speaking about Himself, He says He is "the bright and morning star". He adds touches that others could not add. In these passages He is presenting Himself to His saints in the circumstances in which they are in the first passage, circumstances that were almost overwhelming for John. It may be that we pass through circumstances at times that are almost overwhelming and there is comfort in the Scriptures, comfort in the brethren, but the Lord would give His own touch of comfort as He presents Himself. So He speaks here in the midst of what John sees that overwhelms Him. John says he "fell at his feet as dead", but the Lord gives His own touch. He says, "Fear not; I am the first and the last". Whatever the circumstances may be, He was before them and He is after them, "the first and the last, the living one" and, as if to appeal to our affections, He says, "and I became dead". What a touch of His love He would give us in circumstances that may be overwhelming. Death could not hold Him. The greatest force that works among men is the power of death. Whatever heights men may rise to or whatever power they may acquire, all are terminated by death; but there is One who "became dead", and He says, "I am living to the ages of ages"; the power of death has been broken. It is as if He would say to us, if I have broken that power, what will I not do for you? The "living one": it means He is active. He lay in death three days and three nights, He became dead. What that meant for Him, no heart could fathom. It was not laid on Him. He went that way, in love, of His own accord. He says elsewhere, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again", John 10: 18. At

the beginning of this book I believe He would give that impression that all the happenings that are going to come in—and the book covers a great range of time—whatever they are, He has acquired the power to deal with them all, in that He became dead and He is living to the ages of ages. What comfort for our souls in the exercises that we may face. And what comfort too as we think of what the testimony is going through, what the testimony has gone through and will yet go through in the great forces and powers of evil and darkness that are against the saints. Here is one who is in charge of it all, the Living One, who became dead and is living to the ages of ages.

Then He says He has the keys. That means He has control, control of circumstances, in government, but control, too, dear brethren, of circumstances in our lives. He says "I ... have the keys of death and of hades". He uses them in His own power, and there He holds them. He does not give them to anyone else. He holds them. So He encourages John to lay these things on record for us that whatever the circumstances and whatever the times that we may pass through in His ways, there He is in control of the whole matter. What a comfort it must have been for John in what he was about to see. You think of him reflecting on this verse as he saw these powers that were being unleashed to execute God's government and judgment on the world, that there was One there who was in perfect control! May it encourage our hearts that He is in control of the circumstances in our lives.

In the next section He says He is knocking. He speaks, earlier in the section I read, of Himself as a counsellor. He is speaking here of the circumstances of indifference and coldness that are in the public profession, but too He is speaking of coldness that may arise in our hearts and He is speaking as a counsellor—"I counsel thee". He feels the coldness more than we do. He feels when something has come in that hinders the joy that He would have in our hearts and the communion that He would have between us and Himself. He feels it first. And here He is speaking to a state, to a locality indeed, but He is speaking to a state that marks Christendom but may mark any one of us. None of us, I believe, would have been without some of these experiences, some coldness, some

distance that has come in, and the Lord draws near, draws near as a counsellor—a very fine thing to have someone who can not only point to what has come in but can point to the remedy, and He says He has it, not here meeting our sins as He did in the first instance when we were lost, but here exercising our hearts as to the way back, and the way back to the very best things. "I counsel thee to buy of me gold purified by fire, that thou mayest be rich". There were those in Laodicea that thought they were rich, and that is the deceit of the devil when coldness comes into our affections. We become independent. We think we are rich, but here is a way to true riches, a way to be clothed and to have the eyes anointed "that thou mayest see".

If dullness has come in, there is the Lord as a counsellor, but then here He is speaking, knocking at the door. He is outside. Someone has put up a barrier between the Lord and themselves and He says, "I stand at the door". Why should He be outside? It reminds you of those verses in the Canticles when He was outside: He looked through the window. He could not get in. He could not draw near, but it says here that He was knocking at the door, and then it says, "if any one hear my voice and open the door". It is left on our responsibility. It is left for us to trace the way back, to taste those movements of His love in revival that we may know what it is to open the door. He says, "I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me". May we listen to His voice, dear brethren! May our hearts not be attuned to another voice but, as He speaks elsewhere of the sheep, they hear My voice. So He knocks, but He says, "if any one hear my voice"—it may be in the ministry—then there is His own voice, His own way that He has of drawing near. May there be an answer to His appeal to open the door, to come into normal circumstances and "sup with him, and he with me". How blessed and sweet as communion is restored. How much is in these words, that He would be alongside of us in supping. He would listen to what we have to say. As the father heard the younger son going over some of the things that were in his heart, he did not get it all out, but he says so much. That is like the Lord says, "I will sup with him". The father listens so far and then he says, that is

enough; now I will tell you something: you sup with me. He then was ready to bring him into the great joys that were in his house. How ready the Lord is to respond as the door is opened!

Then finally He gives that precious touch, "*I* Jesus", His own personal name. I think He uses His voice and He uses His name to appeal to us in a way that is more than the scripture would do. Scripture is so blessed and ministry too, but the Lord says, "*I* Jesus". He sent His angel to testify but He says Himself, "*I* am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star". He calls to our minds not only who He is in His Deity, but what He is in His manhood, in all His grace, "the bright and morning star" shining there amidst all the darkness that has come into the world, shining there as the great harbinger of another day in all His lustre—undimmed by all that has happened on the earth—the morning star, still shining, and the answer is that "the Spirit and the bride say, Come". These are the persons who have heard His voice, and there is this great host brought into it: "And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come; he that will, let him take the water of life freely". What an answer there is going to be! May it be vibrant in our hearts today, the answer to the appeal of His own voice, "the root and offspring of David", the One who holds the great matters of God and the service of God in His hand, ready to lead us into it, and the great answer is that there are those who say, "Come".

And then He says in answer to it, "I come quickly". Not only is He coming, but He is already on the way. The fact that He speaks the way He does would show that He is on the way. He says, "I come quickly". "Amen; come Lord Jesus".

KIRKCALDY

13th October 1998

THE LORD JESUS SPEAKING DIRECTLY

Acts 1: 1-5
Revelation 1: 17, 18; 3: 17-20; 22: 16, 17, 20

In each of the passages we have read the Lord Jesus speaks directly, and He would have His own touch in each of the speakings. We are thankful for the Scriptures and for the ministry too, all of which the Lord would use, but in these passages there is a distinct presentation of Himself. They cover from the beginning right to the end of the dispensation. The Lord exercises His right to give His own word and His own particular appeal in the way He presents Himself, as taking account of the conditions, and the state we are in. The Lord's word is never superfluous. It is never too general either; it is specific. The Lord's word is related to the state of our souls and the condition of things we are in; He is moved to say a word directly to help and strengthen us that we may be preserved in relation to Himself. You can see when the Lord was here He was moved as He saw conditions. He saw people listening on one occasion and He added and spoke something else.

In the first passage we have read it is said He presented Himself living to these anxious souls. Luke writes this second book as if it was not enough to leave things as they were recorded in his gospel which ends with the Lord crucified, raised and carried up into heaven. Luke, as it were, says that is not all the story, the Lord's service did not end then. The world largely looks on Christianity in a historical way, something that began in the Lord when He was here, but they know very little about what has continued since the time of His ascending up. Luke would say there is a need to know more than a historical Jesus. Luke writes this to tell us that He is a living and blessed Man, active in relation to the conditions which are here. It says, "he presented himself living". What a touch that must have been to present Himself living. The whole world around, under Satan's influence, said He was crucified—He was dead. They said His life was ended but here He is. To His own He presented Himself living. The Lord is active no longer in relation to this world; He has left it. He is

not putting things right in the world that crucified the Lord of glory. It says, "He came to his own, and his own received him not", John 1: 11. He came to this world and would have put things right. He did this for some; He touched the lepers, He raised the dead, He gave sight to the blind. These were specimen cases. The Lord as here would have put all things right but they rejected and crucified the Lord of glory. He has left the world. He will soon take things up again, but for the moment He presented Himself living after He had suffered. Oh, what a touch of His grace! He would show them that the suffering was not the end of it. After He had suffered, there He is living. The same glorious Man who was here, but living no longer in relation to putting the world right, but living in relation to His saints.

It says too that He was speaking to them of the things which concern the kingdom of God. Scripture says, "he lives to God", Rom 6: 10. He is living in relation to another order of things entirely, but mindful of His own, these few disciples who were, no doubt, very concerned, and tested by the circumstances in which they were. But there He was, presenting Himself living, after He had suffered, with many proofs. Oh, how He would come down to their condition! If it was a doubting Thomas, one who would hardly believe, to him He says, "Bring thy finger here and see my hands; and bring thy hand and put it into my side", John 20: 27. What grace in a living glorious Saviour, coming down to these doubts and fears that marked them, as they do ourselves. But He says, I want to direct your attention to a sphere of things in which I am now engaged. He was speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. As He takes His part livingly in relation to another order of things altogether, He is directing our hearts and minds away from what is here to a kingdom, where other principles apply, where other joys are known. The kingdom of God is not an onerous thing. It has laws, it has principles, but it is a system of blessing, a system of divine satisfaction enjoyed by men. He would attract our hearts into this kingdom where we are livingly sustained by His own presence.

One great feature of the kingdom of God is that the King is loved. You cannot have a kingdom without a king and what

a King He is! In this kingdom everything takes its character from Him, the blessed and only Ruler, 1 Tim 6: 15. His speaking of these things would fill their heart. Perhaps they felt they had lost everything, but He says, No! There is a whole new order of things being opened up in the kingdom of God. Then being assembled with them, He commanded them not to depart. They are under orders. They are not to go back to those things which He has left. The Lord has left the world, it is left to its own devices, and how sad a state it is in. We see it all around us, but in the midst of it there is the kingdom of God. It is not eating and drinking. That is what men would make their kingdoms—eat, drink and be merry—but what death lies upon that. The Lord brings in another order of things—"righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit", Rom 14: 17. Faith's system of rule is a system of enjoyment. I would like to emphasise that the kingdom of God is that. We are apt to think of it as a rigorous matter, but it is a great area of blessing, where the King is enjoyed and where He has liberty with His subjects. It is a wonderful, ordered sphere amidst man's confusion.

The Lord is speaking about these things and you can see it working out through the Acts of the apostles. Jerusalem was all upset and confused, but there are these disciples going on their way in peace, ready to bless, preaching the glad tidings of Jesus Christ. They were opening a door of hope to men amidst all the confusion. They put Peter in prison, they put Paul in prison, they tried to silence them, but there the kingdom of God is operating—a sphere where the Lord's rights are owned and where divine power is known. The kingdom of God goes through because of the One who has suffered once and is now living in relation to the things of God. The Lord's great occupation is the kingdom of God. So we are encouraged to seek it. The Lord says that in the gospels, "seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you", Matt 6: 33. He sees what we have need of in the circumstances here but He appeals to us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He would exercise our hearts that, in the midst of what is in the world today, there is a kingdom of God where His rights are known,

and above all where He is honoured, where divine love is enjoyed. There is a great protected area within, where the strife and confusion that is in the world does not enter, but where peace is known, where the King is enjoyed. I trust we are encouraged to seek it, and to live in this area where divine communications are proceeding.

The course of history goes on and the Lord presents Himself differently in Revelation. Where I have read the Lord is speaking in relation to the great things that are yet to take place but He speaks here very distinctly to His servant. He would use this word, I believe, at this time to stabilise our hearts with regard to the confused circumstances that are abroad. John was about to see great happenings. He was about to have an insight into the great ways of God, things that would normally overwhelm us. We are in the presence today of things that may well overwhelm us. It is the great effort of the devil to upset our faith. The Lord Jesus presents Himself to John as He would to us, I trust, today to steady our hearts, to hold our minds and affections in relation to this great sphere of the kingdom of God. John says that when he saw the Lord like this he fell at His feet as dead. He saw the Lord in judicial garments and if we only knew Him as a judge we may well fear and tremble. But the One who will be the Judge of the universe is the Saviour of the world. The One who was presenting Himself here in relation to the things that were to take place on the earth was known by John, who had already leaned on His breast and been in His bosom.

The Lord, in spite of these garments, comes to touch His beloved servant, saying, “Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one”. The Lord would turn our minds for a moment to see that whatever forces there are abroad, whatever powers of darkness are working, He is in control. The One who was once clothed and mocked by soldiers, upon whose brow there was once a crown of thorns, is showing here that all majesty and all power and authority belong to Him. There is no authority above Him. John sees something of the Lord here judicially but majestically, His hair white like wool as snow, His eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass. There is majesty and authority and power in Him but He is the same

blessed Man whom John knew in His pathway down here, in different circumstances, in different garb, but the same Jesus. Now He touches John and says, "Fear not", I am able for all that has come into the course of history. He would say to you and me today that He is able for what comes into our history. We may fear and tremble; certain things come into our lives at times that we are hardly able for. The Lord says, "Fear not". He is just saying, as it were, Come nearer to Me, I am the living One. He says, "I became dead, and behold, I am living to the ages of ages". The Lord very graciously here shows to John His power to deal with the powers of good and evil. He says, "I became dead". He took the power and authority out of the enemy's hand. It is like David cutting off the head of Goliath, see 1 Sam 17: 51. There He is, blessed Saviour, by dying He has taken the power and authority out of the hands of the devil. That is what He is saying to John. "I became dead"; but death could not hold Him. We were speaking the other night of the Lord Jesus lying in death. How affecting that He should be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, Matt 12: 40! We were reading about Jonah, typically speaking of the Lord, the weeds wrapped about his head, see Jonah 2: 5. The Lord anticipated what it was going to be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. He says, "I became dead". But it was not possible that death could hold Him. He says, "I am living to the ages of ages". That goes beyond time, and He is above all that is coming into time. He is above all that is coming into your life and mine however testing the circumstances may be. He says, "I am living to the ages of ages, and have the keys of death and of hades".

The person who has the keys of a thing is in control, and He is in control of death and of hades. He uses them to His own end. How comforting this must have been to John. I am sure that he must have fallen back on those words when he sees the judgments and the woes that are coming upon this earth. He sees that there is One who has the keys of them all. The key to understanding Revelation, I often think, is that there is a Man in heaven and nothing happens on this earth throughout this whole book unless there is a movement from heaven. The great movement from heaven will soon be that

the Lord will call His church to be with Himself. It is the great thing that we look for. That is the power which He will exercise very soon. In the meantime, in the midst of these powers of darkness and of evil, He is in perfect and absolute control. May our hearts confide in His ability and in His grace and in His love to see us through, to support and strengthen us, and to hold these forces in check. There are myriads of angels at His behest, all doing His will and exercising their power as this book shows, but the Lord is active in relation to His own and He would let us into the secret of it amidst these confused and dark times.

I have read from the Lord's word to Laodicea which represents the days that we are in. He presents Himself to these other churches and there is great instruction in them all. But I read of His appeal to Laodicea because we are in a time of general departure. It is a time of coldness and indifference, when men are vaunting themselves in their own pride and ability. The Lord says, because they are in that state, "I counsel thee to buy of me". That is a fine touch of His grace, that amidst the darkness, the indifference and the coldness that is abroad. He presents Himself as a counsellor. It is a very fine thing to have such a Man, such a One as a counsellor, somebody who gets alongside you. He is able to touch us in every infirmity. He is not a high priest who is not able to sympathise but He has been in the circumstances where these things are prevalent, see Heb 4: 15. That is the Counsellor we have. Because you think you are rich and you are proud and you are independent of Me, He says, I have come near to you in my counsel. The Lord feels the general state but it comes down to us individually. There is something here, I believe, that every one of us would have touched at times. May the Lord speak to us afresh to awaken our hearts as to the coldness and indifference that comes in. We were speaking in the reading about persons who would have a way of life apart from Christ. That is what He is addressing here, persons who can find their home where He is not. He wants to give you the very best and to furnish you with everything you need to be at home in the divine presence.

And so He says, “I counsel thee to buy of me gold purified by fire”. I would just apply it for a moment as divine righteousness. It is righteousness that you can have as your own. You might say, How am I going to buy it? I think the Lord would help us to buy it through self-judgment. That is the great currency in this section here that persons come to judge themselves. They come to see that they have been cold in their affections. They come to see that they have been indifferent to the appeals of divine grace. They see that they have turned away from the Saviour who had bought them, and that they had become independent of Him, and they judge themselves. That is the currency the Lord would have you use and He says, “buy of me gold purified by fire”. It is a righteousness that comes through judging ourselves. Paul was working at this in Corinth. His great effort in Corinth was to get them to buy gold purified by fire. These persons who had been reigning as kings without Christ and without Paul, he would bring them to judge themselves so that they might have this righteousness. He says, “and white garments, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not be made manifest”. The Lord would bring us into these things. He would cause us to come into them.

It reminds me of that young man who said to his father, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee”, Luke 15: 21. The father says, “Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet”. Oh, the grace of Christ to a departing church! May I say the grace of Christ to you and me in our indifference, our waywardness, and the coldness that may come into all our hearts. So He is encouraging us to come near Him and buy these things. These are things that stand in the presence of God, “that thou mayest be rich ... and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see”. He has everything that you need. He says, Come into the area where it is all freely available and enjoy the great wealth of divine blessing. Then He says, “I rebuke and discipline as many as I love; be zealous therefore and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and am knocking”. He has appealed already to buy these things and they still have not answered. So He says, “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". He is knocking at your door and mine that it may be opened. This is a door that you and I may build up. This is a door or barrier that we put up between the Saviour and ourselves. How sad, but there it is. It may not be evil things, but there is something that has come into our lives and it is a door. The Lord does not have free access to my affections in the way He should have, perhaps in the way He used to have because of this door. He stands knocking, He is not kicking it down, but He is knocking.

I see Him knocking in John 21. Think of these beloved disciples. They had gone back to their fishing. You might say that was not a bad thing; but they had gone into a way of life that was shutting the Lord out. What does He do? He knocks at the door when they had toiled all night and had caught nothing. They were skilled fishermen using all their energies and all their resources to try and catch fish, but to live without Christ really, and they caught nothing. What a loud knock it was as they pulled in the net empty. Then He says to them, "have ye anything to eat?" There is another knock, His voice. They said, "No!" He said, "Cast the net at the right side of the ship and ye will find". They cast therefore and it was filled. Then one of the disciples says, "It is the Lord". There was the door opened. Divine grace was knocking with its gentle touch, and He says, "Come and dine". They had nothing to offer Him, but He says, You come in and sup with Me. They were hungry and cold but there was a fire of coals and fish laid on it. "Come and dine", that is the Lord in His grace appealing to every one of us, I believe, for this is something that we all have known in our histories. May the Lord encourage our hearts to open the door today—

Swing the heart's door widely open!
Bid Him enter while you may!

Daniel W Whittle (1840-1901)

is what we used to sing. Let us break down these barriers and open the door so that there may be room for Him. Another verse says—

Room for pleasure, room for business;
But for Christ, the crucified,
Not a place that He can enter,
In the heart for which He died!

He says, "If any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him, and he with me". May we encourage our hearts to open the door, to come into the great wealth and blessing of His company and presence.

He does not want to be kept knocking, but to be speaking; He wants us to be supping with Him, enjoying these great thoughts of divine love, presenting Himself living in all His normal features as He does at the end of the book. He says, "*I* Jesus". In the beginning of Acts He presented Himself, and here at the close of the dispensation it is, "*I* Jesus". What an appeal that Name has to every lover of Christ—

How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear! (Hymn 54)

He sent His own angel to testify these things that were in the book, but He says the great thing that is in My heart is to appeal to you in my personal Name. Here He is speaking about Himself. It is very fine to be in an area and in circumstances where the Lord Jesus can speak about Himself without having to raise questions. He says, "*I* am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star". He is speaking about Himself in all His attractiveness. There is no man in the Old Testament more attractive than David; here Jesus says, "I am the root and offspring of David", the One who is loveable and attractive, "the bright and morning star". He takes account of the darkness of the time we are in. The Lord Jesus speaks about Himself, as this chapter shows, in a way that no other can speak about Him. We are thankful for what Paul says about Him, and Peter and the others, but the Lord Jesus is able to speak about Himself in a way that others cannot. He says things about Himself that we would not dare to say, and

here He says, "*I* am .... the bright and morning star". Peter says He is "the morning star" (2 Pet 1: 19), but the Lord adds His own touch. He says, "*I* am ... the bright and morning star". It is there shining still. If persons are asleep they do not see the morning star. It is gone before they get up. Persons who are looking for Him see it amidst all the darkness that exists on this earth. This star is shining above the earth, in the heavens in all its splendour, and what is it saying as you look at it? It says, 'I am coming'. There above all that is current on the earth. He says, "*I* am ... the bright and morning star".

The great answer to that is, "the Spirit and the bride say, Come". The bride is in unison with the Spirit; indeed the bride here is formed by the Spirit, with affections that are looking to Him; as they see that star shining in all its lustre they are saying, Come. They are not saying, Come to take us away from this awful earth and out of these circumstances. They are saying, Lord Jesus, come; come to reign, come to enjoy the rights that belong to you. That is what the Spirit and the bride are saying. He says, "Yea, I come quickly", and they finish with these words, "Amen; come, Lord Jesus". May it be the language of our hearts today as we are looking for Him, waiting that glorious morn. At the rapture we shall see Him, but we are looking far beyond that to a time when He will be enthroned in His own glory and His own majesty. In the meantime, He would present Himself to your heart and mine, that He may be enthroned there in all His glory, so that our affections may be kept livingly engaged with Him and that we may hear His voice. Soon it will be to see His face—"whom, having not seen, ye love; on whom though not now looking, but believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory", 1 Pet 1: 8. May our hearts be drawn to Him to hear His voice amidst all the confusion that is abroad. May our hearts be open and in unison with the Spirit, saying, "Amen; come, Lord Jesus", for His Name's sake.

LIVERPOOL

17th October 1998

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MEN

Ephesians 1: 3-8
2 Corinthians 1: 19-22
Joshua 14: 6-12 (to "spoke in that day")
1 Samuel 25: 29-31
2 Kings 4: 42-44

It would be clear from Scripture that God's great desire was to dwell with men, and the wonder of it is that in spite of all that has come into our histories God has not changed His mind. As we read in Ephesians, He purposed before the ages of time, before ever the worlds were made, to have men in His presence for His pleasure. He has not altered His thoughts, but in the power of His love He has been able to accomplish His thoughts in perfection. I believe it is good to have our hearts turned away from the confusion, the weakness, and the sorrow that surround us, and that we are part of, to see how God has operated and what His thoughts are and how He is securing them. Paul here in this chapter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ". He has already done it. He took counsel with no one, but He purposed in Himself to have men for His pleasure. I dare say you have all thought of that. Maybe you just think of it on Lord's day for a short moment, perhaps fleetingly, but it is something that needs to lay hold of our affections, that God chose us in Christ before ever time began, and He has not changed His mind. He purposed in Himself. He acted of Himself and by Himself, to have a universe of bliss where He would dwell eternally with men.

Paul is here bringing it to these Ephesian saints that they may be increased in their affections to be, as he says, "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved". Could He have done anything better? The Beloved is Christ, the Son of His love, the One upon whom all His affections were centred and He took us into favour in Him. Could there be a greater favour conferred on man? Could we be taken into a greater position of nearness or blessedness? Paul says, Blessed be the God who has done

that, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". He has not only blessed us with these things but He has taken us into the atmosphere and given us the affections that we may be at home in His presence, "holy and blameless before him in love". He has settled the whole moral question, dealing with it to His glory, so as to enrich us that we should be "holy and blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand". These passages are beyond what the mind can penetrate, but they would leave, as I trust the Spirit of God would leave on our hearts now, some impression of the greatness and grandeur of God's thoughts towards us.

God has worked to redeem us from all lawlessness and all that has come into the race, to bring us into the enjoyment of His wonderful thoughts. When we begin to have spiritual exercises with God and with Christ, our hearts are full, and rightly so, with the relief and the joy of what Christ has done for us; our hearts are buoyant with the fact that the load of our sins has been lifted, and the distance has been removed. We can lift up our hearts to God in thankfulness for the wonder of His love and grace. But that is not all. God did that to bring us to Himself, to know something of the sweetness and depth and fulness of His love. He wants us to be at home in His own presence without a cloud, to enjoy unhinderedly the great realm of His love. God did not only bring them out of Egypt, as they came under the shelter of the blood on the lintel and the doorposts in Exodus 12, but He purposed to bring them into the land of Canaan. Perhaps they, like us, were rather slow to come in. I trust the Spirit of God may stir tonight in all our hearts some response to come into the joy of the house, to know, not only on Lord's day morning, but in our lives and pathways and exercises what it is to be before Him in love now. When they came through the Red Sea it says, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song to Jehovah ... The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea", Exod 15: 1. There was the start of it. They saw that the powers that were against them had been broken and broken for ever. What a wonderful day it is when we see that all that was against us God has dealt a death-blow to it in the death of His Son. He has broken the authority of the power that

would hold us in bondage. But more than that, it says, "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance", Exod 15: 17.

They had rejoiced in deliverance, as we do, but what about the rest of the time? What about our history since God intervened in His love to redeem us from the bondage of sin? It took them a long time going through the wilderness. They appropriated the grace of God for themselves. Instead of doing that we are to see that the grace of God has shone into our hearts so that we might be "to the praise of the glory of his grace". He has made known "the riches of his grace", typically in meeting Pharaoh, drowning these horses and riders in the Red Sea. The "riches of his grace" did not stop there, of course, they went through all the wilderness. If they were needing water, God provided the water. Oh, the riches of His grace, they drank it, and what happened then? They began to murmur again. Oh the perversity and slowness of our hearts to come to enjoy the riches of His grace that has abounded towards us. Think of day after day in that wilderness, what came in? As they felt the need of food, the manna was all round about them; they ate of it and they murmured. Do you see some reflection of that in your heart? I do for myself. We see the richness of God's attitude and disposition and the resources of His love towards us. We enjoy it for a time and then we go back to our old ways. God had in mind that from the Red Sea the next step was on to the Jordan. It was not only that Christ died for them to break the power of Egypt, but He moved through all the great barrier of death and all that stood against them as typified in the Jordan, to bring them into the land, the land where God would dwell with men, where they would enjoy their God, and He would enjoy having men in His presence. He did not change His thoughts because of their murmurings. He did not change His plans, although there was a generation that did not go in, but there were two men who stood out from that generation who did go in. What was the difference? They had appropriated the purpose of God. That was Caleb, that was why I read about him. All those round about him were murmuring and rebelling, they were living to themselves, but he says, "If Jehovah delight in

us, he will bring us into this land", Num 14: 8. Caleb said, Surely God did not bring us out of Egypt that we should live to ourselves and perish in the wilderness. No, he says, If God delight in us He will bring us in. He, in type, had some sense of a God who had purposed and had chosen us in Christ before the world's foundation. He says, What has come in in our history is not going to alter that; He has resources in His love to meet my state, to meet the circumstances that I am in to bring me through them as an overcomer that I may come into His presence in all the liberty and joy of being taken into favour in the Beloved.

Well, there is Caleb in the wilderness surrounded by people who were dying and what does he see? One day God says to Moses, Bring before me twelve staves, a staff for each tribe; the names of all the princes were on these staves and they are laid up before God. What happened? In the morning there was one staff which had budded and blossomed, Num 17: 8. It was there shining in its lustre. That is the passage we read in 2 Corinthians 1 that the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Every other man is out of court. Caleb saw that rod. It was laid up before Jehovah, and I can think of Caleb day after day being reminded of it and saying, There is the assurance that God will bring us in. Think of the promises made to Abraham. Think of the promises made to us. There are not only the promises that He would free us from Egypt, but He says, "I go to prepare you a place", John 14: 2. It says that Christ has gone "into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us" (Heb 9: 24), is your eye on that Man in the presence of God in whom all the promises are yea and amen? He met the strong man once in his own domain. He took the power of death out of the enemy's hand. Now there He is, crowned with glory and honour in the Father's presence, Forerunner of us who have been called into this area of divine blessing to be for God's pleasure and praise. Oh how humiliating that God has put every other man out! They murmured, they had aspirations, they thought they could do things themselves. Only one Man stands out in the purpose of God.

It is a very illuminating thing to get into your soul that Christ as Man is central to the purpose of God. The section we read in Ephesians shows how it was worked out according to the counsel of His love; in those counsels it was determined that One of the Godhead should come into the circumstances of manhood. It says, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1: 14); in those circumstances He brought God near to man, and in His death and rising again He has brought man near to God. Blessed be His name that there is a Man in whom God's purposes and promises have all been effectuated for His eternal praise and glory. God purposed it before ever time began. He looked on to time and He is looking beyond time to enjoy His eternal thoughts. It says, "the tabernacle of God is with men", Rev 21: 3. Typically, Caleb cherished that, in spite of all that they were saying, and all that was happening round about him, God would bring him in. Caleb had been sent to spy out the land and he had seen how wonderful a place it is. Do you not have a taste on Lord's day morning of how wonderful a place the presence of God is? It is just as sweet on Monday. Whatever the circumstances of your life, the presence of God is unchanging, the love of God is unchanging, and He is as pleased to see you any day of the week as on Lord's day morning. He is as ready to receive you. He is as ready to fill your heart with the purposes of His love at any time.

Moses was another man who went through the wilderness; what trials and tribulations he must have seen, but in his psalm he begins by saying, "Lord, *thou* hast been our dwelling-place in all generations", Ps 90: 1. I have often reflected on Moses. What days of trial he had, with the people coming to him with their burdens and complaints. But what does he say? "*thou* hast been our dwelling-place". He did not live on the troubles of the testimony or in the sorrows of the wilderness. He felt them, he cried over them, but he says, "thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations ... from eternity to eternity thou art God". Time has not changed Him, nor affected those purposes of His love. Caleb had some sense of that, and now he says, I want to live there. In all these pressures and assembly sorrows he did not separate himself

from them, he went through them all, every one of them. Caleb felt them more than the people did. The loss of his brethren, how he must have felt it, but all the time in his heart was treasured that God would bring them in. He says, If God delight in us He will bring us in. What he had seen of that land, those grapes and pomegranates, a land where God's eye was upon it, he says, I want to live there. Would that such a desire was stirred in all our hearts, to live there. It did not alter his responsibilities, but he moved superior to the wiles of the enemy, and to all that was there around him of persons living to themselves.

There is a danger with us of saying that these things are somewhat unreal. May I remind you that the person who wrote those words in Ephesians was in a prison, writing with a chain round about him. That shows how real it was, that the prison, the chain, the circumstances, did not for one moment alter his enjoyment of the purpose of God. Indeed the truth is that we need to know the purpose of God to live rightly in the wilderness. That is what Caleb did. He knew the purpose of God, he knew what it was to be taken into favour in the Beloved, and so he was able to live in the wilderness. You have to be an Ephesian to live in Corinthian conditions. Now I always thought the other way about, that you went through Corinthians to Ephesians, which is true on the moral road; but to live in the circumstances of the assembly of God in Corinth you need to be an Ephesian, and Paul was just that. He says, "Railed at, we bless; persecuted, we suffer it", 1 Cor 4: 12. The more you oppose me, the more I love you—there is an Ephesian in Corinth. He did not adjust his conduct to the state of the meeting; he did not say, So-and-so is doing that therefore there is licence for me to do it. No, his conduct is governed by the enjoyment of his place in the purpose of God. There is a danger of adjusting ourselves to the circumstances; if one says, I will do this, and they do it, maybe they lose the joy of the presence of God in doing it; but sometimes it gives licence to somebody else. That was what the Corinthians were doing, they were comparing themselves with themselves; but there were men among them, Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus, who were not living that way, they were living in

the light and joy of being taken into favour in the Beloved. May it fill our hearts increasingly, what it is to be taken into that favour.

Someone said to Mr Darby, It is deep waters. He said, Yes, but they are calmer. Think of Paul living in those deep waters amidst all the Corinthian exercises, in the calm and enjoyment of being taken into favour in the Beloved. Well, there is Caleb. If others were going off on their own ways and doing their own will, he was living in the sense of being taken into favour in the Beloved. He says, "Jehovah has kept me alive" and "as my strength was then, even so is my strength now". Now he says, I want to live there, "give me this mountain". The strength that he derived from God's love and the enjoyment of it gave him strength to overcome the enemies, and Joshua gave Hebron to Caleb. Hebron speaks of what God had done before the world's foundation, and we leave him there in the enjoyment of God's love dwelling in Hebron, the place that God had designed to dwell with men. There is Caleb, and all others have gone. Where the pride and arrogance of those men in the wilderness? They have all gone, and there is Caleb enjoying still the freshness and sweetness of the love that chose him in Christ before the world began.

Abigail I just refer to for a moment. She too had some sense of the purpose of God in very, very difficult circumstances. David here is not a type of Christ, he is more representing the testimony in a Corinthian setting where perhaps men would take things into their own hands. Abigail comes alongside David and speaks to him those words that she had enjoyed in her own soul. She lived with Nabal, a man who was full of himself, of whom David thought, I will deal with that man because he is troublesome. Abigail says, Leave that to God. That is what you can do if you are living in the sense of the enjoyment of God's love. There are many things today, dear brethren, that we can leave with God, the great Judge; He is the One who executes judgment, not us. David thought he was the one who would execute judgment, and he may have seemed right, many supporting him. There is Abigail, who says, No, can we not leave that with God? Can we not pursue this line of His purpose? She says to David, When you come

to the throne this will not be against you. She knew what God had purposed, and that purpose was that He had anointed David to be king over His people, so Abigail says, Treasure that in your soul and leave Nabal to God. And God dealt with him. If David had done it there would have been another blur on the testimony, but he took Abigail's advice, he left that with God. She says, "And it shall come to pass, when Jehovah shall do to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning thee, and shall appoint thee ruler over Israel". At this point David was fleeing from Saul, he had no home, he was seeking his bread day by day where he could find it. Did it look as if he would come to the throne? Abigail was sure he would. Does it look today that these brethren, gathering in small circumstances, will soon be the ruling class? Is that how you regard them? There is reproach on the testimony, sorrows on the way, no outward show, nothing to attract man naturally, yet they will soon be the ruling class. Abigail says, God has decreed it. His purpose for David was to bring him to the throne. His purpose was there before the world's foundation choosing us in Christ to have us in His presence for His own pleasure. Well there is Abigail, able to bring something of the purpose of God into the sorrows of the testimony and leave matters with God, which He deals with in His own way, to His own satisfaction, and to the blessing of David.

In 2 Kings 4 the man from Baal-shalishah is able to bring some food in from another country, because that is what Baal-shalishah speaks of. Baal-shalishah I understand is a place where the Lord had His rights, a place where God's authority was bowed to, and it was a place where His love was enjoyed. So it is a critical time. Somebody had cast something carelessly into the pot and there was death in it. There might have been persons poisoned through what had come in. That is very much around us today, the danger of persons being poisoned through things that are coming in, through what has been thrown into the pot. There was meal there to preserve it. Now here is a man who can bring in another kind of food, a man who is living in the enjoyment of the love of God, who brings in resources from another country all ready to be eaten.

There was nothing to be cooked, no preparation to be done. It says he "brought the man of God bread of the first-fruits, twenty loaves of barley". He had been feeding on Christ. Firstborn from among the dead, the Yea and the Amen of all God's promises, and he says, I have something for you. Can you bring that into the local meeting, dear brother, dear sister? Abigail was a sister. Here is a man who is unnamed, it could be anyone. May our hearts know something more of what it is to bring something from the presence of God, to bring in food among the saints. It says, "they ate and left thereof, according to the word of Jehovah". That is the great triumph of God's love, that He has met everything that has come into the race and come into time, and soon He is going to take the spoil of what He has wrought in time and He is going to house it in eternal conditions, the tabernacle of God is with men. He is going to have men in His presence for His own eternal pleasure.

May our hearts be filled with the wonder of His love, the glory of His grace, that what He has purposed He has been able to do, through the work of Christ in redemption, and the grace of Christ as our great High Priest, to bring us in and plant us in the mountain of His inheritance. Soon it will be the portion of the saints to be dwelling with God. That will be the first thing. Then they will come out from that dwelling of God to rule among the nations. But the first thing is that God will have the enjoyment of His love with those that He has purposed to bless. May our hearts be looking forward to that moment increasingly! May the value of the treasure, the joy of what He has purposed, be in our souls so that like Caleb, we can be here overcoming, living in the joy of the Man who has gone in. May we be like Abigail bringing wisdom into difficult circumstances, wisdom that proceeds from the purpose of God, that meets the circumstances of the day and saves the situation. May we be like the man from Baal-shalishah bringing supplies of heavenly food among the brethren. May each one of us be exercised to be available, dear brethren, young and old, brothers and sisters, to bring into all our circumstances, that what we are in God's presence and in God's sight is not only true for us, but it is true of us in the

circumstances of life here, so that we can join with Paul and say, “For of him, and through him, and for him are all things—to him be glory for ever”, Rom 11: 36.

May it be so, for His Name’s sake.

ABERDEEN

30th January 1999

"HOLD FAST WHAT THOU HAST"

2 Timothy 1: 13, 14
2 Samuel 23: 11-16

Among the last words of the Lord to the assembly at Philadelphia are, "I come quickly: hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown", Rev 3: 11. That is what led me to these scriptures, that we may be encouraged to hold fast what we have. We are in a day of great departure, with many of the cardinal truths of Christianity being given up and undermined, and I believe the Lord would use these words as an appeal to us to "hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown". What has come to us has come at great cost, "others have laboured, and ye have entered into their labours", John 4: 38. I suppose most of us here can thank God for others who have held the ground, I say again, at great cost, so that today we can come into these circumstances of blessing to enjoy what we have. The need is to hold it fast. That would mean it is not to be held loosely. It is not to be held as something that we can take up at our leisure, or as something that we can enjoy when we have time, but holding it fast means it is to be cherished by us. I think one way, perhaps the only way, that things will be held, is in the affections of the saints. They certainly will not be held officially. I think we have seen that, and we see all around that you may have the terms of Christianity, with a great outward show, and yet the vitality has been lost. We suffer ourselves perhaps in our own histories, and certainly in a collective sense, from things having been held officially.

The Lord speaks to Ephesus, where outwardly there was much to commend, saying, "thou hast left thy first love", Rev 2: 4. So the Lord would encourage us that the truth is to be held and enshrined in our affections; and held, as we have read in this first passage, by the Holy Spirit. It is a wonderful thing that the truth is going through in this dispensation as never before. What a comfort and strength and encouragement to hold fast. The Lord says, "I come quickly", and as He comes, He comes to gather up what has been held in the affections of His people. Other dispensations, I use the

word guardedly, have declined because they depended for their continuance on man's responsibility. While that is not absent in our time, the dispensation we are in, dear brethren, is going through because everything has been founded on the Man in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen, 2 Cor 1: 20. What an encouragement to hold fast as we see how things are sustained and maintained at that great level of what is set out and dependent upon Him. As I say, our responsibility is not absent, and we shall speak of that, but what an encouragement to faith that in the inauguration and the carrying through of this dispensation, divine Persons have charged themselves to see it through. There is the stability, there is the assurance that the testimony is going through. It is not going to fade out but will end in glory, having been treasured in the hearts of persons, who will soon be gathered up into glory to be eternally with Christ. What a hope for our hearts and stay for our souls in the presence of what men may be doing! As the enemy is active to undermine, we have the blessed assurance in our hearts that the dispensation is going through in the Spirit's power, a tribute to Him and His grace as being here in this long dispensation. It is going through too as the service of Christ is known; as His great priesthood and succour is known by the saints, we are supported to the end at the true level of what is characteristic of our time.

So Paul here is encouraging Timothy in a broken day. He saw what was coming in, and says, "Have an outline of sound words, which words thou hast heard of me". It is necessary that we should understand the outline, and, as the footnote says, hold it fast. The great cardinal truths that have come to us are to be held fast in the presence of so many efforts of the devil to undermine them. What we have in the blessed assurance of our sins forgiven, and the blessed hope of our souls of the return of our Saviour, these great cardinal features of the truth that have been set out and are to be cherished in the hearts of the saints; and also the truth that we have been freed from all that we are, as having been taken into favour in Christ. These are great outlines to be cherished in our souls. The enemy would bring many things in to cause doubts, but as Paul says here, "Have an outline of sound words". It is very

encouraging that they are still livingly maintained. Think of all that has gone on in this dispensation, the attacks there have been against the sound words, the truth of soul salvation being undermined, and the truth of the assembly being undermined. What efforts there have been to reduce the truth, but it is very fine that there is still an outline of sound words.

It is there in the books, in the ministry of the recovery. It is important that it should be read and cherished by us, as that which has been recovered in the Spirit's grace and is there to be appropriated. The Lord would encourage us to appreciate what we have. How much there is to engage our souls and our minds positively in that outline of sound words. Paul says elsewhere, "Think of what I say", 2 Tim 2: 7. Some of it may be hard to be understood the first time; read it again. He says, "the Lord will give thee understanding". Do not just say, I do not understand it. It is there to be understood. The outline of sound words is there to be enjoyed. So it would encourage us all to broaden out in our outline of sound words, which Paul says, "thou hast heard of me". One thing that has been attacked is Paul's ministry, and I believe that is what was in mind in the Lord's word to "hold fast what thou hast". We can thank God for the truth that we have been recovered to that there is a Head in glory, a living Man up there, our Saviour and Lord, and there is the Holy Spirit here indwelling the assembly, maintaining something in a vessel here that is suitable and in accord to the One who is above in glory. That is to be held fast. The truth has come into our hands at great cost to God.

What forethought has gone into this dispensation. Not that there was not forethought about Israel, but in this dispensation divine Persons have charged themselves with seeing it through in triumph and glory, in a vessel down here being maintained in something of the joy of the place that Christ fills in heaven above. It is wonderful to know that we have been brought from darkness to light and have been brought into an area of divine blessing where the thoughts of Christ and the assembly can be cherished. I think it needs to be gone over increasingly day by day among us, what there is in this vessel that is so precious to Christ, what there is in this

vessel that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's activities. You remember in Genesis 24, when the Spirit typically comes into the house. He brings out of His treasure these silver and gold articles, and gives them to Rebecca. That has happened in our time. The Spirit has unfolded the great things of divine love and the resources of divine grace. It does not just say He brought out silver and gold, but He brought out *articles*, something that had been formed in divine love and grace. Think of Rebecca appreciating what had come from another country, from outside of the area of man's responsibility, from the resources and the wealth of divine love. The servant, a type of the Spirit, brings them out and you see Rebecca appreciating what He had brought. It says the others were given something too, but there was something very precious for Rebecca in those silver and gold articles and clothing, Gen 24: 53.

These things have come in our time, I say again, at great cost; there has been developed in the Spirit's grace a ministry as to Christ and the assembly that needs to be held fast and cherished in our minds. You can see what an effect it had on Rebecca, immediately she says, "I will go", Gen 24: 58. I think that is the great effect of the truth of Christ and the assembly coming into our hearts and into our minds, that we are prepared to conduct ourselves in another way. Great influence is brought to bear upon her. They say, Do you have to be so responsive? Do you have to be so committed? Ah, she says, My heart is enraptured, captivated by what the servant has brought out, "I will go". May that response be more vital in all our hearts as we come to see what we have been brought into in this area of wonderful blessing. There have been times when things were held very loosely. That seemed to happen after the apostles. Things were not treasured as they should have been. Officially they may have gone through, but there was, many years ago, a revival as to this great truth that I am speaking of, and it came into some hearts. It has been spread abroad by the Spirit that there is something here in the assembly that is precious to heaven. She is heavenly as to her origin and belongs to Christ, but presently is here in the Holy Spirit's care. He is serving in untiring patience that we may

be preserved in the light and joy of what through grace we have been called to have our part in.

So it says, "Keep, by the Holy Spirit". It is the only way it can be kept. Rebecca was kept in freshness. How long the journey was we do not know, but there she is in freshness adorned with that clothing and those precious articles, ready at the end of the journey to be in the embrace of Isaac, who is a type of Christ. That is how the dispensation will finish, dear brethren, we shall be there held in the embrace of Christ. He will be in the joy of what has been secured in suffering love, and we shall be there with our eyes feasting without a cloud on the One who has loved us and served us in such matchless grace. May it be kept alive in our hearts, as Paul says, "Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit". We have in our hands now, "the good deposit". It has been preserved intact despite all the efforts of the devil to undermine it. Think of Paul cherishing it in his soul as he was in prison, penning that epistle to the Ephesians, with such a sense of his place in Christ, and too of what Christ had in this vessel that is here, the same vessel that will be eternally His counterpart. Although the assembly was there in those conditions of persecution and reproach outwardly, Paul is in the enjoyment of that good deposit entrusted. May the Lord encourage our hearts to be more responsive, to be more caring, to be jealously guarding what has been brought within our reach.

The scripture speaks of Solomon having a couch and of these mighty men that were around it. It is very like the local meeting. There is a place there that is different from what is around. The saints are not gathered on human principles but they are gathered in affection for Christ and for one another; it is like Solomon's couch and it needs to be guarded. It is like the doors shut where the disciples were. There needs to be persons who are prepared to guard Solomon's couch. Are you among them? Are you committed to guard the interests of Christ in the responsibility that has been placed on you where you are? Are you prepared to guard a place where He can find His rest? It says, "Behold his couch, Solomon's own". There are these mighty men guarding it, ready to defend his interests, ready to care that his rest is not disturbed—

Threescore mighty men are about it,
Of the mighty of Israel.
They all hold the sword,
Experts in war SofS 3: 7, 8

There is a call at the present time for persons who are not on the offensive exactly but are here with the sword ready to defend the interests of Christ, ready to see that His rest is not interfered with. In spite of the smallness and pressures and sorrows, they are prepared to guard what is precious to Him, so that He can find His rest in a world where His rights are denied.

I think that would be like Paul here encouraging Timothy to "Keep, by the Holy Spirit". As I have said, there is a divine Person here to help us to keep matters at the true level that is suitable to the heart of Christ. There is no other way, but what wonderful grace that the Spirit of God Himself has come to be with us and in us. What a mission He is carrying out in these days in which we are! May we give ourselves to know His grace and power and service so that there is something kept in our localities that is for Christ and for Christ alone. We must begin with ourselves, of course. These are individual days in which Paul is writing to Timothy saying, "Take thy share in suffering", 2 Tim 2: 3. That is how things will be preserved, sufferingly, as persons are prepared to sacrifice their own interests, their time, their satisfaction and their rest, so that the interests of Christ and the outline of sound words may be preserved for those who are coming on. It would be an exercise for all who are older to see that things are being passed on untarnished. It would be a big exercise that the truth is being passed on in its glory and freshness so that it is held and passed on attractively. So Paul is encouraging persons to take their share in suffering. That is the only way it will go through because of the condition and circumstances we are in. He says, "No one going as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of life". The Lord says very clearly, we cannot serve two masters, Luke 16: 13. Rebecca had no hesitation at the choice. What an appeal there was for her to stay, but she had no hesitation. That man had captivated her affections. The Spirit's grace and service had

endeared Isaac, the heavenly man, to her, and she says, "I will go". So it says a soldier cannot entangle himself with the affairs of this life. If we have been called to have part in this wonderful vessel, these other things are below what is proper to the assembly. There are many calls upon us that we get grace and strength to fill out righteously, but the great calling for the Christian, as Paul speaks of it, is "the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus", Phil 3: 14. As called into such a vessel we are not to be entangled with the affairs of this life. The enemy is very active at the present time to entangle the saints with the affairs of this life. What demands are made upon us. It is like the people of old in Egypt; Pharaoh laid added burdens upon them and enslaved them in his system. The devil is doing that by the world today, in various insidious ways, to take the saints away from the glory and richness of their heavenly calling to ensnare them in the things of this life. You may say, there are difficulties, but we are to "Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us". There is a divine Person come here to help us to fulfil righteousness. He has come here to help and strengthen our desires for the heavenly Man. Things are to be held in the affections of the saints, and the Spirit is here to nourish those affections, to keep us in the enjoyment of the love of God. It is a great word in Jude's epistle, in a day of apostasy and of rising evil, he appeals to the saints to "keep yourselves in the love of God", Jude 21. What love of God is all around us, and how richly we have been given to taste of it, but the exhortation in those declining days is, "keep yourselves in the love of God". Then also it says, "make straight paths for your feet", Heb 12: 13. The Lord says, "if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body will be light", Matt 6: 22. What blessing there is in having our eyes directed to the heavenly Man.

I read of David because we have here some men by whose activities things were held fast. In Saul's time things were held very loosely, held as optional. The ark during Saul's time, where was it? There was one woman, before Saul came to the throne, who said, "The glory is departed", 1 Sam 4: 22. Oh how she felt it, and publicly the saints would feel something of that now. There is not the glory of the beginning

of Acts exactly, but the glory has not departed, dear brethren. The glory is not here in its public display, but it is here enshrined in the hearts of the saints. So the ark was very loosely regarded in Saul's time. If you had asked persons, Where is the ark? they would hardly have known. It was in Abinadab's house, and the Spirit of God uses these words about it, "the time was long", 1 Sam 7: 2. Things were held officially, persons perhaps kept the ritual, but the ark was not held in the affections of the saints. But David brought the ark, as a type of Christ, to be enshrined in the affections of the saints. And here are persons who, when the trial comes, are ready to hold fast. There is the attack of the Philistines. How strong that is, great pretentious armies that would carry all before them. They would take away the distinctiveness of Israel. That was their great effort, to destroy what was distinctive to the people of God, and that is abroad today. But here is a man who was ready to defend them against the attacks of the Philistines.

Another group was gathered, the Philistines in a troop. Not only individual attacks but there was an organised attack, as there has been against Christ and the assembly, and here is this man who defended the food supply. There was this plot full of lentils, maybe not much value to men outwardly, but he would defend it; he stood there, and it says, "Jehovah wrought a great deliverance". Hold fast, God will work the deliverance. We are not called upon to put the world right, we are not called upon to set Christendom right as to its errors, but we are called upon, dear brethren, to hold fast what we have "that no one take thy crown". These persons with David, were holding fast the crown. They were appreciating what had come to them in David's grace and in his reign. So it says of this man "he stood in the midst of the plot and delivered it, and smote the Philistines, and Jehovah wrought a great deliverance". He had judged in himself the mind of man working in the things of God, and so he was able to bring help into the local company; he was able to name things when difficult circumstances arose, and God wrought the deliverance. May we be encouraged to stand and hold fast.

Then there were three men who heard the longings of David. That is what we would seek to hold fast above all else. They heard the longings of David when he longed and said, "Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem". Have you ever thought of the longings of Christ? Have you ever thought what He feels about the breakdown? We know what we feel about it and the sorrows that have come in, but have you ever thought how the Lord Jesus feels it? It says about Him prophetically that He had laboured in vain and spent His strength for nought, Isa 49: 4. What service He rendered towards Israel and there they are unresponsive. What labours He has rendered towards the world, and there it is going on without Him. Have you ever thought of the feelings of Jesus, that men are so bent on themselves, how the Lord feels the departure that has taken place? These men were prepared not only to hold fast, they were prepared and ready to respond to his longings. May our hearts be encouraged to give Christ something that He longs for. How much He has given for us. How much He has brought us into. Now He would give us to know something of His longings, "Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is in the gate!" It says they "broke through". They broke through going there to secure it, and they broke through coming back to deliver it into the hands of David. How precious it was to him!

He longed for it for himself, but when he received it he poured it out to God. Oh how blessed an experience to know something of Christ appreciating what we minister to Him in our time. It says, "the three mighty men … brought it to David; however he would not drink of it, but poured it out to Jehovah". Think of the Lord Jesus having something in this present dispensation, through the saints holding fast what they have, answering to His affections, and the Lord Jesus taking that and pouring it out to God. Have you ever thought of that? It may be some little bit of suffering that you have undertaken, some confession of the name of Jesus that you have made, something simple in your life of committal to the Lord's interests in your locality; the Lord says, How precious that is to Me, and He pours it out to God. That is how the

response Godward is being secured, there are persons who are seeking to please the Lord Jesus, they are seeking to give Him something in response to the appeals of His grace and His love. May it be enshrined in our affections and held fast. He says, "I come quickly". What a hope and assurance for our hearts, what an encouragement to hold fast, "I come quickly". However long or however short the time may be, the Spirit of God is here so that these longings of Christ may be appreciated in the hearts of the saints and we give Him to drink. The celebration of the Lord's supper each week may tend to become a formality, the recurrence of it may cause it to be held very lightly, but it is part of what is to be held fast. The Supper is to be held intact at its true level as the request of the Lord Jesus, "this do in remembrance of me", 1 Cor 11: 24. In this time when Christ is rejected there are persons who would gather together to remember Him, to answer to His longings. There is what He has provided for us, but in the Supper there is what He secures for His own heart, and what He pours out to God.

May there be, dear brethren, in all our places, an increase of what there can be in the hands of Christ that becomes so rich Godward. So that God has His joy in seeing, in spite of all that has come into time, the fruit of divine labours in something going through that is going to end in glory. May we increasingly, as committed in affection to our absent Lord and Saviour, have our part in holding fast, knowing the Spirit's power and strength to hold the ground. We are not asked in these days to be pioneering, but things have come to us. May we have grace and affection to hold fast till He comes so that He may have a response in the meantime for His own heart and for the pleasure and praise of God, for His Name's sake.

EAST FINCHLEY

20th February 1999

REPAIRER OF BREACHES

Isaiah 58: 9-12
Nehemiah 1: 2-7, 11; 2: 11-18; 3: 1, 15; 4: 4-6; 11: 1,2; 12: 31-40

I would seek grace from the Lord to speak about building, and especially about repairing the breaches. It is a needed service in these days, and I would seek to enlist every one of the brethren in the work. The sisters have part in it—indeed at the end of the book of Ruth it speaks of two sisters, "which two did build the house of Israel", Ruth 4: 11. Nehemiah will show us—his day is very much like our own when the enemy has sought to make great inroads into the fellowship of God's Son, to spoil what there is here on this earth for the pleasure of God. But in spite of all that has happened in the history of time, our Lord Jesus Christ has come in to repair the damage that sin has done, to make a way back to God that no law or works of man could ever effectuate. It says as to Him when He was here "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself", 2 Cor 5: 19. I wonder at the majesty of that verse, "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself". Had it not become lost? Had not Satan had his way in the world so early to spoil the fair creation? The law, coming in, only magnified the great distance there was between God and man, but there in such a dark background, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself". God was not going to be robbed as to His thoughts of the assembly as the vessel in which His praise is secured. May the Lord speak to us at this hour to encourage our hearts to have a living part today in the great praises of God.

The Lord has been the great Builder. He says, "on this rock I will build", Matt 16: 18. There is what He has built that has never broken down and never can break down, "on this rock I will build my assembly". I trust that every one of us is conscious of having a part in what He refers to as "my assembly". That is certainly not what is abroad today, that men would call 'the church'. It is not what is seen publicly, but it is known, and very precious to those who know it. I trust that what the Lord speaks of as "my assembly" is cherished by every heart in this room. He says further, as if to reassure our hearts,

"hades' gates shall not prevail against it", Matt 16: 18. That word is for you and for me, "hades' gates shall not prevail against it". It may seem, as you look at the public side of things, that they have, but they have not, and I trust that every one here knows something of having a living, vital, part in "my assembly". You say, Where is it? Well come here on Lord's day morning and you will see it functioning, if you have never seen it before— "in the midst of the assembly with I sing thy praises", Heb 2: 12. In spite of the breakdown, there is nothing more precious to an assembly-minded person, whatever the outward conditions and however small things may be, than to have part in what there is here for the heart of Christ, that He can employ in service to God. That is "my assembly". You will not see an outward show. You will not see a choir and an organ or great pretension, or a prayer book or an arranged system, but you will see something, I would trust in character, of the assembly functioning. May our hearts be exercised to have our living part in it. That is what the Lord is building. As I say, He says for us, "hades' gates shall not prevail against it". You say, Where is it? I say to you, Seek it. The Lord does not make light promises, nor are His words to be taken lightly, but if you soberly seek it He will lead you to have a living part in it and to see it in function. There is some expression of it today in this country, in this town, to be experienced by eyes that are open to see it and hearts that are exercised to have their part in it.

But then there is another side to it, of which we have read in Isaiah and Nehemiah. There is what has been committed to man's responsibility and sadly most of us in this room would take our part and say, We have had our part in the failure and in the sorrow and the breakdown that has come in. I trust we all acknowledge that feelingly before God, to make room for divine grace outshining.

In this passage in Isaiah, the Lord is rebuking them. He says, Is this what you call a fast? Men proclaim their fasts, they try to afflict their soul, and so on; He says, Is that what you call a fast? You will find persons who would do these things and think that that is the way through the breakdown, but God is saying, That is not what I call a fast. He says, "Then shalt thou call, and Jehovah will answer; thou shalt cry, and he will say,

Here I am". How sweet those words! How near He would make Himself to exercised hearts to say, "Here I am" to lead you, and what He leads them to in this passage is the joy of the new covenant, the way into the great system of blessing. The new covenant is based, not on the law, but on the work of Christ and all that He has accomplished for God, that, because of the work of Jesus and what has been effectuated in His death and rising again, God is able to come out with His hands outstretched in blessing to men. That is what he is referring to here, "And they that come to thee shall build the old waste places". This is what is needed today, as we will see in Nehemiah, persons who are conscious of all that has happened, and see that apart from God in His mercy and in His grace there is no hope and no power. But in the great ways of God and His wisdom He is coming out in this attitude so that the foundations will be raised up. Thank God they have not gone! "The firm foundation of God stands", 2 Tim 2: 19. This is something that man has not been able to interfere with, "the firm foundation of God stands … The Lord knows those that are his". If things were normal we should know them, but things are so broken we do not know them all. But the Lord knows those that are His, the Lord knows. He would cause us to be exercised to find them too. We cannot just take things altogether at face value. There is a great system of profession around, so there are many we have to leave on that account: yet "The Lord knows those that are his" and "the firm foundation of God stands". He calls on us to come into this line of things to be a repairer of the breaches. As I said, it refers to the Lord Jesus, but there is a call to us in this passage to be a "Repairer of the breaches, restorer of frequented paths". Generally when there is breakdown, men try and start something else. That is what has happened all around. There has been departure and breakdown, and men have started something else that is short of the fellowship of God's Son; but here it says that they will be a "restorer of frequented paths". Nehemiah did that. He did not try to start something new that would accommodate the wishes of the people. The wall broke down but there were still foundations, and Nehemiah too used the stones that had been there before: it says, after they were burned; the fire had done its work. How wonderful to think of these stones being set up again! There they are, a heap of

rubble. On one side of things you see that publicly today, a heap of rubble, but as those stones are revived, after they were burned, they are fitted into their place. Think of the sheep-gate and the valley-gate being built of stones that had been revived. May the Lord revive our hearts today to be stones that are suitable to come into the building.

But first of all I wanted to speak about the kind of man that is a restorer of the breaches, the kind of man that is able to come in and build these frequented paths. You see him here in Nehemiah. His name, as you will see in the footnote, means 'Comfort of Jehovah'. What a man to be builder, to be a restorer of these paths. What delight God had that there was a man, Nehemiah, and may it be in you and me in our measure, who has come to seek the welfare of his brethren. That is what is said about him later. The enemies were annoyed that there was a man who had come to seek the welfare of his brethren, and there he is, a man who is a 'Comfort of Jehovah'. God had looked on that ruin that had come in through failure in man's responsibility. But here is a man who valued what God had put in his heart to do for Jerusalem. He would give us all something to do, primarily in our local place: he would give you something to do to repair the breaches, to restore these frequented paths. Here is the kind of man that can do it, a man who cried to God when he saw the confusion. He did not start talking about all the trouble that was there; far less did he send letters abroad or go on the Internet and speak about the confusion that has come in among the brethren. No, he went before God on his knees in prayer night and day. He says, "I sat and wept, and mourned for days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of the heavens, and said, I beseech thee, Jehovah, God of the heavens". Dear brother, dear sister, have you in any measure done that about the sorrows of the present time? I leave the question with you, Have you in any measure been before God about the confusion and the sorrow, and told God that you contributed to it? Not what So-and-so did or how wrong others are, but you; and maybe you will find somebody next to you on their knees about the same thing, and there is a wonderful bond to start and build on the foundations, the foundations that have been laid. Nehemiah is the kind of man that rallies the

brethren. He has influence through having wept, and prayed, and been before God about all the sorrow. Now he rises up. He does not remain there, I may say, longer than needed, though he carried it with him all the time. In chapter 9 he goes over his prayer again—three outstanding prayers that are easily remembered, and I commend them to you: Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9. You can easily remember that, and read them, and you will see men in whose hearts God had put something about Jerusalem. The kind of men that God can trust to be builders and repairers of the breaches, men who were fasting before God, crying out in their need, as Nehemiah here. He becomes desperate in his appeal to God, and dear brethren, we need to be that in all our localities, and especially in this country where what came out in the light of the temple was quite distinctive. Are there now persons prepared to be with God like a Nehemiah, like an Ezra, like a Daniel, to be a repairer of the breaches? You say, What can I do? Well, this started with one man. The book ends with two great choirs on the wall, but it all started with one man. He could have said, Well what can I do? The breakdown is too great for me; and so it is, but it is not so for God. He has a man like Nehemiah with these feelings who wept, cried and yet in his heart all the time (you will see as you go through these prayers, especially these chapter 9s to which I have referred), they never lost sight of the purpose of God. In the faith of their souls there was enshrined in their prayers, that in spite of the ruin, "hades' gates shall not prevail against it". In principle they said, Lord show me it. And He did. So he finds others with him. In these exercises the Lord would soon add as He sees persons who have something in their heart that God has placed there. He says, he did not tell any man what God had put in his heart to do for Jerusalem, but he went himself, three days' journey. These three days of scripture, as the brethren know, are very interesting. They bring us on to resurrection ground, to see how God has dealt with the breakdown and the confusion. He has raised Christ in whom all the promises of God are Yea and Amen, see 2 Cor 1: 20. What a beautiful scripture to cling to! It says, "For whatever promises of God there are"—and what promises He had made to you and to me—they are all Yea and Amen in Christ, the glorious Son of God. These men laid hold of that in their

prayers. May I encourage our hearts to lay hold of the promises and the purpose of God amidst all the confusion there is? The three days bring you to see that the promises are all centred in Christ, the Man of God's choice at His right hand. He says, "I told no man what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem". May God put it into your heart tonight, if never before, to come to see something of what God is ready to do for Jerusalem, what He is ready to bring in as to that holy city. Oh how beautiful it was in Nehemiah's eyes! In spite of it being rubble he clung tenaciously to God's thoughts in purpose, "hades' gates shall not prevail against it". He goes through these gates—how he must have wept!—the valley-gate, the jackal-fountain and the dung-gate. It is very interesting that he refers to these three gates; there were others, they were in ruins. They had forgotten, they had despised these principles of going down. In Deborah's day certain roads were unused, Judg 5: 6. That is what has happened today; you say that is only Paul. That is despising these gates, despising these frequented paths, but Nehemiah, he goes over them. He sees the dung-gate, the jackal-fountain and the valley-gate. He sees them in ruins. Have we forgotten, dear brethren, how to judge ourselves? Have we forgotten to see that things are settled through going down? Christ made Himself of no reputation. He "emptied himself, taking a bondman's form", Phil 2: 7. That is how things were settled. The whole sin question and all that had come into the race, He has settled in "taking a bondman's form … becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross". What that meant for Him our hearts could find no language to express, but there it is. It is the way he went to meet the confusion that has come into the race. I say again, Have we forgotten how to judge ourselves? Have we forgotten the principles that are there to establish recovery? Paul brings that home to them in Corinth, the cross and all that has effected there to make way for the liberty of the Spirit in chapter 2. Here is Nehemiah going through these places. He says, "Ye see the distress that we are in, that Jerusalem lies waste". He does not minimise the difficulty, how great it is, but he says, "Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach". Well, there is reproach round about, and what we have done has caused reproach and we have to leave that, but

let us come and build, that the persons who may reproach us may see that there is something positive, that, in spite of all that has come in through our failure, these stones having been burned are now serviceable. They had become unserviceable at one time, but now through repentance and through faith in God and what Christ has done, the stones are serviceable to be rebuilt into this wall in view of the great choir. That is the great end of the wall. The wall has a reference to the fellowship: it is there to protect the city. Ezra gives us the building of the city, the inward side of it, and for that it says that God raised up Cyrus. God has raised up Christ to bring in that side of things, but here in Nehemiah it is what is in man's hand, the responsibility that there is as in the fellowship to build and repair the breaches that there may be something that is no longer a reproach. So he says, "Come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem". Are we ready, dear brethren, at cost, sacrifice to ourselves, to come and build up the wall? As they built it, they did not build independently. They did not scrap what had been there before. Rather, as it says in Isaiah, "restorer of frequented paths". They did not say, We will start something new, we will start another meeting where these principles are not emphasised. They did not speak on that line, they did not remove the ancient landmarks. There are ancient landmarks that have been laid down, that is the apostles' teaching. Even in the public domain the removal of ancient landmarks has caused tremendous confusion. The breakdown in family life, the breakdown in principles of government, allowing things that in our fathers' day persons were put in jail for, the government is now sanctioning them. There are the ancient landmarks being removed and it is bringing in tremendous confusion universally. Let us respect the ancient landmarks. Some of them—I speak advisedly and the brethren I trust would be sympathetic in how I speak of it—were re-established in the recovery in the 1800s, through which in grace we have been called to have part. There was then a great movement of the Spirit of God, when persons were liberated from a system in which the Holy Spirit of God was shut out, to come to see that the ancient landmarks were restored, and that there is a Head in heaven and a body here; Christ's body. These are part of the ancient landmarks, and there is a danger among

us of saying, Well, that is old-fashioned, things have changed. But those ancient landmarks are good until the day when the church is raptured. The commandments of the Lord and the ancient landmarks stand there as a guide to us, to keep us in that holy path, that when the beloved Bridegroom comes for His bride, she is ready. She has respected the ancient landmarks, she has walked in the commandments that were referred to at the close of the reading, so that she is there when He comes. When He calls, what an answer there will be! There are some beautiful references to it in some of the hymns—

> O Lord, with our ears and hearts open,
> Awaiting Thy shout would we be. (Hymn 131)

There is a man amid all the ruin who had respected the ancient landmarks and was kept in the freshness and buoyancy of his affections for Christ. Nehemiah is on that principle. He does not give them new names. The priest comes to build first, "Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they built the sheep-gate". They are beginning to think about the brethren, thinking of all those sheep. Do you ever mourn about them? Do you ever sing the song of the bow? What a song! If ever a man had a right to rejoice over the death of Saul it was David, but he composed the song of the bow. "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their lives", 2 Sam 1: 23. Do we miss the brethren who are no longer available to us? Nehemiah and these priests were carrying them in their heart before God. So they rose up to build the sheep-gate. The men that God has helped have been shepherds, they have thought about the sheep. In the steps of the great Shepherd they have laid down their lives for the sheep, they have trodden the path to stand between them and the foe. Have you ever done that—prepared to stand between the foe and what the brethren may be facing? The sheep-gate is what they start with. You would want to make a place of safety for the brethren. There is not time to go into these great matters, but it says, "The valley-gate repaired … they built it, and set up its doors, its locks and its bars", Neh 3: 13. They want to make the thing secure; they go all the way. They do not just take half measures but they go all the way about the repairing of the breaches. You know, if there is the least centimetre left exposed the devil gets

in. May our hearts be guarded! May we go all the way in the repairing of the breaches as these priests did, and these men who repaired the valley-gate, the dung-gate, the fountain-gate. What would they think about? Oh, I think they would think about Solomon's time, of the city in all its glory. You may be labouring at the sheep-gate, maybe the dung-gate, but you do it in the light of the whole assembly; you are doing it in the light of how precious it is to God. It says later on that they were joined. I wonder if your repairing can join with my repairing. That is the test. You get a plumb line coming to the wall, and if I have been a bit loose in my building, it will not measure up with yours that has been straight and has gone by the pattern. Maybe I have allowed things in my circumstances that have deviated from those ancient landmarks, from the Lord's commandments and what has been laid down to guide us. Then we will not join up. Let us value the ancient landmarks and keep to these ancient paths, that as we come together in the work that we are doing it can join together. It says, "we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together to the half thereof; for the people had a mind to work". They put their backs into it. They did not say, Well, I think I have done enough. Some people took a second part. How pleasurable that must have been to God that they took on a second part! As you look over these passages in detail you will see there were goldsmiths doing labouring work, there were perfumers doing the work; there are not specialists in this kind of work. It is like Paul, "bondman of Jesus Christ, a called apostle", Rom 1: 1. These are the builders, the bondmen, persons who have been captivated in their affections for Christ and drawn into committal to Him and His interests here, so that the building goes on. It says later that it was completed in fifty-two days; the whole was joined and it was completed. How quickly God turned the captivity as there were persons in whom repentance toward God was working. How quickly He turns the captivity and brings in the restoration of Jerusalem, that beloved city.

In chapter 11 it says a call went out, "cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city". There it is. You say, Had it not been in ruins? Here it is, "the holy city". Divine thoughts about it are going through. There have been the

repairers of breaches, the builders of the wall, persons who have worked according to the commandments and the pattern, and here now is a place to dwell in, persons to dwell in Jerusalem. The safety, the security, of the city is dependent on persons prepared to dwell in it. We often speak about assembly-minded persons; that would be these persons who are prepared to dwell in Jerusalem. Yes, they had to do their work, they had responsibilities in righteousness, but their heart was in the holy city. They gave themselves to the work, and here they are to bring one in ten to dwell in Jerusalem. It says, "the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem". Well, it is a place to live in now; and that is what has come to us through faithful men, that there is a place to live in. They could not live in it in Nehemiah's time. There was no wall: it was a dangerous place, but, through one man being committed like this, it is now a place to dwell in. And that is true in our time. Are we prepared to be one in ten? Are we prepared, in spite of what there may be abroad, to commit ourselves to dwell in it, for our blessing but primarily to dwell in it for God's glory and praise?

I only wanted to speak about these two choirs. Who would have thought that those stones that were a pile of ruin and rubble in chapter 1 are now supporting the great praises of God. It says, "I brought up the princes of Judah". There they are, persons shining in their grandeur. Dear brethren, the whole point of the wall was these choirs. One point of it was to keep evil out—that is true—but primarily it was to enclose the city, to protect Christ's assembly, to keep out what would harm. The fellowship does that. There is the protective side to it. It is anxious to keep out what would spoil what is for the heart of Christ. These builders now on that very wall are singing the high praises of God. It does not just say 'two choirs', but there was enough for "two great choirs", and then the "processions … upon the wall". They go through those gates, the dung-gate; they halted in the prison-gate. How they would feel all that had come in! They went through these gates, each of them, and stood still in some of them, feeling the sorrows and the breakdown, but that did not hinder the great service of praise. We have been taught that if having been engaged in the conflict

we lose sight of, or are not able to have our part in, the praise of God, there is something wrong. The conflict is not an end in itself. It has to be faced, but in the midst of it the service and praise of God is the great object, and it was the great secret in Nehemiah's mind. You say, He did not speak of it in chapter 1. No, but the great thing in his mind was that there would be something secured in which the service of God could go out, the praises of God could go out in all their fullness. So it says, "They went up by the stairs of the city of David". Oh, these were well-worn steps. It alludes to the way that Christ has gone, the steps that He has taken, the way He has ascended. "They went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David". They are not giving new names, as I said already, but they are falling back on God's great thoughts in His promises, and are seeing that in spite of a broken day they are workable, and the praises of God are continuing. So these choirs go forth, one under Ezra. There is much teaching that we have not time to go in to, but Ezra represents a spiritual line of praises, as it were, and Nehemiah represents a moral road to the same end. It says, they "went in the opposite direction". There are not only the stairs of the city of David but there is a moral path through "the tower of the furnaces … the gate of Ephraim … the old wall … the fish-gate … the sheep-gate; and they stood still in the prison-gate". There is the breakdown, and yet the praises of God are going on, "both choirs stood in the house of God". There is the great end, dear brethren. May we be encouraged to find our place in the house of God. The firm foundation of God stands. The house of God is there to be enjoyed by those who would commit themselves to the path. May I appeal again, dear brethren, for us all to take our part in being a repairer of the breaches, to restore the ancient paths, to commit ourselves afresh to the building up of what is here protecting the interests of Christ, and on the other hand to have in our hearts to make room for the praise of God, for Christ's Name's sake.

MELBOURNE

2nd April 1999

"DO NOT HINDER ME"

Genesis 24: 53-61 (to "followed the man")
2 Kings 4: 1-7
1 Peter 4: 14-16
2 Corinthians 5: 4, 5

It may be a fitting finish to the day we have had to reiterate the servant's appeal in Genesis, "Do not hinder me". The servant here, typical of the Spirit of God, has come from the Father, come from glory, fresh with the Father's delight in Christ. What a matter for the Father that the sin question, which raised its head at the very beginning to spoil the relationships between God and man, has been finally settled! The great answer to that and the Father's joy is that He has sent to secure a bride, a counterpart for Christ. That is the reason for the Holy Spirit having come here from the Father, with the wealth of heaven, come with "silver articles, and gold articles, and clothing", precious things. What resources the Spirit has brought in to attract our hearts! How they attracted Rebecca! I can just visualise her eyes being enlarged, her heart swelling, as she saw those beautiful things. It does not just say that he brought silver and gold, but he brought articles; he brought on to her view some of the precious glories and features that have all been secured through Christ having gone into heaven. The servant comes freighted with these treasures and he displays them. They could not but be affected, the whole household is affected by the great wealth that the Spirit of God has brought in. They say, let us put it off for a minute, let us wait a few days. They could not deny the wonder or the blessedness of it, but they say, does it have to be now, does it have to be today? They say, "Let the maiden abide with us some days, or say ten". But here we have the servant's voice, "Do not hinder me". I believe it is a voice that would be very appropriate to listen to at this moment, "Do not hinder me". We have had these good times together and I am sure that all our affections have been stirred, but we will have other matters to face very soon. May that word remain in our affections, the Spirit's appeal, "Do not hinder me". He is carrying on a great mission. The glorious end of it will be that at the end of time,

the assembly is seen as a bride adorned for her husband, see Rev 21: 2. What a tribute to the Spirit of God having come out with these articles of silver and gold and clothing. I have often thought that Rebecca, having accepted those things, could not but go to Isaac. Whose eye would appreciate them like his? Whose eye would be captivated by that clothing as she adorned herself with what the Spirit provided, but the heavenly man who could appreciate the detail and the beauty of her, clothed in those beautiful garments?

That is the great mission that the Spirit is bent on. Time is running out, time is short now. We were reminded of that at the close of the meeting, the glorious end is very near. The Spirit's voice would be all the more urgent, "Do not hinder me". We have all, at various times in our histories, been affected by spiritual ministry, but are we prepared to answer to it? It says, "Rebecca arose, and her maids", and there as she moves on and responds to this appeal of the Spirit she finds a great system of help available. She must have wondered earlier when she saw all those camels—what is all this for? Did the man need all these camels, all these things, great resources and reserves that the Spirit has brought to keep us here superior to wilderness surroundings and circumstances. Rebecca as she moves had some fresh impression of those resources and power in the Spirit of God to carry her through into these final circumstances, where she can be in the embrace of Isaac. The time is near; soon He is to have His bride in all her beauty. Soon the true Isaac is to be captivated by what He sees, the glorious results of the Father and the Spirit's operations, that there is a suitable counterpart to be with Him in the realm of glory. What it means to Christ to have the assembly not only for His own heart, but a companion that will be with Him in the affairs of the universe. What a comfort it is to His heart that He will never again be alone. I do not think that Christ will ever be seen again alone. It speaks of the assembly as being His fulness, His counterpart. As He takes up these matters with the nations, the subduing of all things to Himself, He will have a counterpart with Him, a great confidant, one who shares His great objective of

securing a whole universe for the eternal praise of God. The Spirit of God is here today working to that great end.

We have had some impression in the meetings already of the great end that is in view, that Christ is to have a counterpart with Him in all His affairs, never again to be a Man alone. Blessed be His name, He was once alone, because there were matters that only He could deal with and He was alone in doing it, but the blessed answer to the completion of that work is that He has with Him, and will have with Him eternally, a bride suited to those realms of glory. This is the Spirit's operations today, this is what He is bent on and He is saying again to you and to me today, "Do not hinder me". May there be with us the captivated heart of a Rebecca, "I will go". She said that in full calculation of all that it meant, maybe never again to see her father or mother or family. She said that with her eye on these beautiful garments; the man for whose eye these are, what a man he must be! She says, "I will go". May our hearts be encouraged! As Pharaoh said to Joseph's brethren, "Let not your eye regret your stuff", Gen 45: 20. May our eyes be drawn, as the Spirit of God has liberty with us, to direct our hearts and eyes towards Christ where He is in His glory, waiting, seeking a counterpart to be with Him, and have confidence in the Spirit of God and the resources that His love has provided to conduct us very soon into that eternal home.

We spoke in the reading of the Spirit's movements being largely what is individual. While that is true, I would like to say that the Spirit's movements always have a collective end in view. That is the bride. The Spirit's activities are not to set us up only individually, but to set us in relation to the whole. It says, "in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body", 1 Cor 12: 13. We are not left (we have individual relations), but the Spirit's great end is to bring us to have part in this bride that is for Isaac. He has that always in view, He is always leading us into this one body. He is seeking a bride for Christ.

The woman in 2 Kings 4 knew some of these things. She says to Elisha that she was a widow of one of the sons of the prophets. They do not shine in a very good light in this

book; they are very much like a good many of us, all of us at times, maybe less from today than before. They are persons who know the terms; they had known better times, they spoke of previous times, and here is this widow. She is left and what I want to bring out is that she did not appreciate what she had. She was there mourning; how difficult things had become. She was emphasising how weak things were. I would like to convey from this passage one very precious matter that I think helps us all—the Spirit operates within the realm of our faith. If you are living in doubts the Spirit is hindered. The Spirit was hindered with this woman. It is very sobering also to think of how the Lord wondered that they did not believe and because of their unbelief He was not able to do certain things, see Mark 6: 6. That is true about the Spirit being here, that He is hindered and may be limited because of our lack of faith. This woman was looking at all these things and she said it is death before us. She has to be adjusted, to come to realise that there is something there that has the power of life. It was despised, as she says "not anything at all in the house, but a pot of oil". How discouraged she had become, how downcast! Perhaps there is a heart here that knows something of that, what it is to be downcast and feel that everything—alas some of our dear brethren feel that all has gone, things collectively are finished, they fear that the glory has departed. She says, "Thy handmaid has not anything at all in the house", but Elisha says what you have is more than enough. This line of thinking brings us into bondage; it brought this woman into bondage. She was not able to meet her liabilities. One thing that the Spirit has come to do is to help us to fulfil our responsibilities. It is a very fine feature of the ministries of the recovery that in the assembly there is a vessel able to meet our responsibilities. The brethren should look at that; it is called fulfilled responsibility. A great many learned persons said that it was not possible to fulfil responsibility because everything from Adam right down has broken down. Noah broke down, Israel broke down, everything that has gone before has broken down, but here, in the assembly, empowered and indweIt by the Holy spirit, there is power to meet every responsibility and to glorify our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is the great service of the Spirit today, operating within the realm of our faith, that

He gives us power to meet the liabilities and fulfil all responsibility and live in the joy of Christ's love, the joy of our place as chosen in Christ before the world's foundation. These are the things that the spirit, in the type, is bringing this woman into. He tells her that there is a way to go. If we have been discouraged, if we have said that there were better times, if we feel that things have become broken and almost lost, He says there is a way to meet it. Largely that way starts in self-judgment. The way of meeting these things is to own that our view has been wrong. There is no fault in the oil; the fault was that the pot of oil had been disregarded.

Paul brings the Galatians through this exercise of 2 Kings 4. He says "Ye ran well; who has stopped you", chap 5: 7. "Having begun in Spirit, are ye going to be made perfect in flesh?", chap 3: 3. It brings in a line of needing to judge things. This woman needed to judge how she had perhaps nominally assented to the previous ministries, but she was not vitally in it.

We said in our earlier reading that it all happened through a waning in our affections and the reviving begins in self-judgment, judging ourselves, judging how she had allowed such a state of things to continue when that pot of oil was there all the time. How much we would have to say it, feeling for ourselves, every one of us, how much the blessed Spirit of God has been disregarded, how little room has been made for Him. How often we have turned a deaf ear to His voice, "Do not hinder me". May it be that we are turned around today, freshly revived, invigorated in our affections to regard what there is here in the house. It is like the ark in Samuel, in that house disregarded, a show piece, little respect paid to it. The Spirit of God says about that period, "the time was long", 1 Sam 7: 2. How God felt it that the ark was so disregarded, and how heaven felt it too that this pot of oil in the house had been disregarded. Elisha puts her through exercises to go and borrow vessels, to make use of what was there and find that there was more than enough to set her up here, fulfilling every responsibility and living in power on the rest. I would like to have seen her filling those vessels. They brought these vessels; she pours out, the oil stayed. Every responsibility met, more

than enough. It would be like the exercises of the soul going through Romans, I am sure. Think of her filling the vessels with oil. I think she would put a label on one of them and she would say, Justified. Very beautiful! She fills one vessel, and she says that is settled, I am justified. You say, Is she not justified in Christ? Yes. But the Spirit makes that good in her soul and she sees that she is no longer under condemnation, she is no longer under the liabilities that the devil would bring to put her in bondage. She says, I am justified. It says, "It is God who justifies: who is he that condemns?" Rom 8: 33, 34. Think of her filling another vessel, and she puts on the label, Reconciliation. She sees that not only has she been set up clear from every liability, but in the power of the Spirit's grace she has been brought into the joy of being reconciled to God through the death of His Son.

These matters are real, the filling of these vessels is very real and experimental in our souls, that we come to see that we are not only justified and reconciled, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. What ground to be brought on to. She is brought on to enjoy sonship. She is brought into the wealth of the glad tidings. It is all here in the Spirit's grace to give us the power to live, "thou and thy sons on the rest". Think of the joy coming into her heart when she sees that she has more than enough! No longer criticising the brethren, no longer mourning all that has happened, no longer with her eye on the past, but there she is set up—

> Thus joyful, bright and free,
> I take the heav'nly road (Hymn 228)

—in all the joy that the spirit of God would shed abroad in her heart. That is one of His great services, shedding abroad in our hearts the love of God, and leading the sons of God through these circumstances in the joy of the resources and the power of divine love, and it is all there just within your reach, within the reach of faith like the woman in the gospel, the hem of his garment was just there (see Matt 9:20), ready to be touched, ready to be availed of. The Spirit of God is in the house, not in the world. The pot of oil is in the house. May we live in that area, to avail ourselves of what is available to

meet every situation and be empowered, in the joy that the spirit of God would bring, to "live thou and thy sons on the rest". It connects with the Galatian epistle where Paul mourned. He says, Ye are sons of God, and there you are overburdened with beggarly principles, see Gal 4: 9. How near these things come to us at times, short of the great grace that is there centred in the Spirit of God. He labours with the Galatians that they may come to appreciate what was there available in the house, instead of reverting to what is legal, or knowledge or even doctrine in itself, but he labours there to attach and revive their hearts again into the great grace that has come within their reach in the Spirit of God.

I referred to Peter to show that there is suffering involved. The circumstances of the way involve that. If we are to be true to what we have been called into it will involve suffering and I think the Spirit of God especially joins His help and is particularly known in circumstances of suffering. Someone remarked today already that in conditions of prosperity we are apt to be neglectful, but in conditions of suffering, the Spirit of God is made more room for. I think you see that shining in Stephen. There was a man reproached in the name of Christ. It is not exactly for Christ, but it says, "If ye are reproached in the name of Christ". I think it means that there are some features of Christ coming out in your pathway, some expression of Christ in your life, and that will necessitate reproach, but it says, "blessed are ye; for the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you". There it was upon Stephen. Stones, ridicule, how much was pressed upon him. How restful he seemed to be in the midst of these sufferings, able to speak as he did, and yet in the full consciousness of seeing the heavens opened, seeing Jesus at the right hand of God. There is the Spirit's service to Stephen in a most remarkable way, "the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you". It means that He has not been hindered. The suffering that you and I may be passing through may be for that purpose, to rid us of the hindrances, to help us to make more room for the Spirit of God to rest upon us.

It reminds you of the dove, the way he came on Jesus, how beautifully he rested there, complacent. What He brought

in with Him in heavenly glory and grace, "descending as a dove from heaven, and it abode upon him", John 1: 32. Here in measure the same thing is true of the suffering saints, "the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you". It says, "suffering as a Christian". Most of our suffering is in other ways perhaps. Here Peter is addressing people who passed through tremendous suffering on account of the faith, and there they were suffering in the name of Christ and he is encouraging them with these words, "the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God rests upon you". What communications He would bring into those sufferings. It reminds you too of the persons in Daniel in the fire. It says, "the appearance of the fourth is like a son of God", Dan 3: 25. The Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. I am sure, in some measure, many have known it; the gibes and the attacks of men, how real and sorrowful they are, but what a recompense, the Spirit of glory and of God resting upon you. What communications they must have enjoyed! He tells those same brethren, as he begins writing to them of their great inheritance, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by sanctification of the Spirit', 1 Pet 1: 2. What a recompense in the suffering and the reproach for the Spirit to have liberty to engage us with our heavenly part. That brings me to Corinthians. The Spirit there is spoken of as the earnest. He is speaking here of the end of the journey. We have been speaking of something of that, the completion of the journey in glory. The completion here, as Paul is bringing out, is our body of glory, and that will be the great end of our time here, that we will be soon in a body of glory, but Paul is saying that in the Spirit's grace there is already something here that is going to be clothed with a body of glory He says, "he that has wrought us for this very thing is God". The work of God that has been worked out in the saints here in the Spirit's grace is going to be clothed. Something substantial is going to be put upon it, a body of glory. It will be like unto His own body of glory. There is something here ready to receive it. Paul is bringing that to these saints, "if our earthly tabernacle house be destroyed" (v 1), but he says, "we have a building from God ... eternal in the heavens". The great foretaste of that today, our heavenly hope, is not only described in the Scriptures, but in the Spirit of God there is

some entrance now, some joy now in the present sufferings, of what our eternal home will be. He says, "who also has given to us the earnest of the Spirit". I understand that to mean that you already have the things in essence, you already have the joy, the foretaste of what that eternal matter will be, by the grace of the Holy Spirit of God. Peter had it. He speaks in his epistle of "that the putting off of my tabernacle is speedily to take place", 2 Pet 1: I4. What does he speak of immediately? He speaks about the glory that he saw on the mountain. That experience that he had had some years before, the Spirit of God had made very real and dear to Peter. There he is speaking of putting off his tabernacle, and he speaks of what he saw on the holy mount, "eyewitnesses of his majesty". In himself he was somewhat saying, Very soon I will be alongside of Him. He will be unique in His majesty, but we will be clothed in like bodies, suitable bodies, to be at home in the presence of divine greatness. May our hearts be encouraged that the earnest of it is now in the Holy Spirit of God. He says in an earlier chapter in Corinthians, "and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts", 2 Cor 1: 22. Is there room for it? Is there room for Him in all these trials and sufferings that we pass through? Is there room made for the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts to engage us beyond what is of time, what is of man, that we may have some sense of the power that there is to bring us in.

May I again, in closing, use the Spirit's words in an appeal: "Do not hinder me". How great the hindrances are, but many of them, if we just enquired into them simply, would they stand the light of day? We often hear the expression, What is the harm of it? I would like to say in answer, ask the Lord. I once visited an aged brother who had become discouraged and was wanting to give up, and he was trying to justify to me the reason for his not being at the Supper. I just simply said to him, Can you say that to the Lord? Can you justify to the Lord why you were not at the Supper, because of these reasons you have told me? I think that is a very real matter. We make up many excuses. We speak about the pressure of our time, about many things that are coming in, but can we really, in the presence of the Lord, say that is the

reason for my not being at the meeting? This is the reason for my not being so committed as I might be. Can we really say it to the Lord? Can we really say it to the Spirit in the presence of His appeal "Do not hinder me"? Dear brethren, may our hearts be encouraged, and not only have the goal before us, but in faith to tread that heavenly road in the power of the Spirit of God who has come here so near to us within the realm of faith to give us the power that eternal things are our joy and our hope now.

May I close with that word again, "Do not hinder me". For Christ's Name's sake.

SUNBURY

June 1999

at three-day meetings with Mr Ron D Plant

SONSHIP

Galatians 2: 23-29; 4: 1-7
Romans 8: 12-15
2 Samuel 9: 6-8; 19: 24, 30

RT I suggested these scriptures that they might afford a spirit of liberty to speak to us as to sonship, a matter as to its term with which we would all be very familiar. I believe there is scope for the Spirit to enlarge us in our thoughts as to the practical expression of it. I thought in the passage in Galatians, we have the light of sonship—a very wonderful thing to come into—"for ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus". In Romans, I thought we would see something of the power of it to be in expression, "led by the Spirit of God". In Mephibosheth, I thought there was perhaps an example of someone who lived in the joy of it in testing surroundings, in the sense that his true place, eating at David's table as one of the king's sons, nourished him in view of being loyal in the testimony.

Perhaps first we could speak of how sonship has come into expression in our time as never before. It has come into expression in Christ. It is remarkable how much He is referred to as the Son. What came into view in that pathway, in His circumstances here, as John says, was "a glory as of an only-begotten with a father", John 1: 14. In His movements here you saw a Man who was in relationship with His Father. What results flowed from that relationship! Speaking too that has come into our dispensation, God speaking, but He is speaking in Son. The whole dispensation, you may say, is dominated by the light of sonship and the One in whom it has come into expression, all to the end that we might be attracted into it, that there may be the features of sonship continued in us today. So it says, "but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son". That was how it was going to be expressed, not in law or in prophets or in angels, or even in Israel, although they would perhaps know something about it in some limited sense, but God in this day and dispensation has brought this relationship on to view in Christ. As we follow His footsteps, what we see is a Son with a Father. What power

that gave to all that He did! It displayed itself in many ways, but what was seen was a Son with a Father. May our hearts be attracted into that relationship and to see that it is our portion!

RJC Does sonship bring us into liberty and wealth over against the law of which the apostle treats here?

RT I think that is what the apostle has in mind here, that the light of it may dawn on our souls to bring us into a great realm of liberty and affection, and into joy. The apostle here is correcting bondage. He does not correct it by dealing with the state exactly but by bringing in the light: "for ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus". Paul does the same in Corinth. While he takes up matters, he tells them, "Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God?" 1 Cor 6: 19. Do you not recognise yourselves? I believe the Spirit would encourage us to help us to recognise ourselves, to see what we really have been brought into. We do not work up to sonship; we do not reach sonship through state, but state is coloured from sonship. I think that is what Paul would say: that is our light. When the light of it dawns in our souls, it frees us from looking to ourselves for things, but we see that God's thought about every believer in Christ Jesus is that they are a son. And so in that light He would instruct us that we might come into the affections and the liberty that is suited to the great Name that has been named upon us.

CKR "So that the law has been our tutor up to Christ", but this is something entirely new and the blessed source is in God Himself. Has that come into operation?

RT Yes, so we are in a different time. We are in a time when the whole matter has come into display in the Son in all its blessed attractiveness and what liberty He had with the Father in those movements. It says He was in His "Father's business", Luke 2: 49. And He speaks about His "Father's house", John 14: 2. His whole life was towards the Father and the Father being pleased. What liberty He had as being in the joy of that relationship!

GCMcK In Romans you have the Spirit of adoption, but here the Spirit of His Son. Does that show the level of things that God has in mind, that what is set out so blessedly in Christ is in some way to be in our hearts, in our experience?

RT It is absolutely beautiful. God has no lesser thought. Mr Darby says—

> And is it so, we shall be like Thy Son?
> Is this the grace, which He for us has won?
>
> (Hymn 247)

It will require another body for its fulness, but if we could just get some sense in all our souls that God's thought for us, whenever we come to know the Lord Jesus, is that we are a son!

RG It is no afterthought. We are "marked … out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself", Eph 1: 5.

RT There is a time—and now is the time—that that has come into display.

RG I was thinking what a stabilising influence it is when you realise that God has had this in His mind before time was, and we have been in His mind, "marked … out beforehand for adoption".

RT And now the time of the law has passed and the time is for receiving sonship. It says, "That we might receive sonship". God is dispensing it in all the wealth of His love, and it is now the time for receiving it. I think the sense of receiving it puts a dignity upon us and a power within us in the Spirit that we no longer are debtors to the flesh, but we are able to live here in the power and in the joy of a known, undisturbed relationship.

RJC Has the Spirit been given that we might enjoy sonship? "For ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus". As you say, that applies to every believer, but the Spirit would give us the full enjoyment of the relationships that God has brought us into.

RT So that God does not only give us the title: He gives us the power to enjoy all that the title conveys. It is a very remarkable section of scripture. "But because ye are sons, God has sent out the Spirit …". From this point of view, you are a son even before you have the Spirit in the conscious sense of it. God is thinking of us so bountifully and so richly that now He would bless us with all the resources that are needed to be in the joy and the liberty of being His sons.

WL Paul in chapter 1 in his reference to "his Son" speaks about "was pleased to reveal his Son in me, that I may announce him as glad tidings among the nations", v 16. That seemed to colour Paul's ministry.

RT Very remarkably, and you can see sonship coming into expression in Paul, perhaps next to the Lord. There he is in Galatia, in Corinth with all the troubles; there is a son in liberty! The enjoyment of that relationship coming into his circumstances, I think, answers a thousand questions. We have a sense that we are brought into this position of favour and given the resources to be maintained in the height of all that that favour has conferred upon us.

DAS The Lord Jesus did not take very long to introduce the truth and joy of sonship to the man in John 9. He saw he was ready for it, do you think? "Thou, does thou believe on the Son of God?", v 35.

RT Yes, it is very beautiful how quickly he came into it. He came into the joy by being in liberty outside the system. His life had been dependent on the Jewish system before, but I think a son of God is not dependent on any system for his joy and happiness. As a son of God, you are brought into another atmosphere and order of things altogether where everything is sustaining the joy of these relationships that we are called into. I recall an address in this city some years ago by Stanley McCallum. He said, we often speak of laying hold of sonship, but, he said, my exercise is that sonship might lay hold of us. I think that is a very exercising remark. None of us here but knows something of sonship, perhaps on Lord's day morning. We know, in these hymns that we sing, something of our place of acceptance. But sonship laying hold of us is something far

deeper than that. It means wherever I go and whatever I do, is marked by someone who has a relationship with the Father. That coming into our practical exercises, dear brethren, is something very pleasurable to heaven and very powerful too. The enjoyment of sonship we will see from Mephibosheth. He was a different man from all that was around: he was in the joy of having his part at the king's table, eating bread as one of the king's sons.

GCMcK Paul could say in chapter 4: "Be as I am, for I also am as ye, brethren", v 12. The thing was expressed in him. That is your exercise, that we should be so in the enjoyment of it that it is expressed in us. Do we become influential in that way?

RT I think so, and I feel the importance of the light of it laying hold of us. As I said, it is not setting aside state, but sonship is to affect state rather than the other way round. When we are younger we perhaps think that sonship is something older brethren reach. We think it is something we will reach as we get through the exercises of the flesh, but sonship is God's thought about us as we come to have faith in Christ Jesus. I think that is delivering for us so that we then seek help and prove the Spirit's grace that it is not only a term, but the joy of it and liberty of it are proved in our daily lives.

RJC "For ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus"—yet sonship had not laid hold of these persons, so it is a question of seeing what God has bestowed on us, the dignity of the relationship that He has brought us into so that this might, as you say, lay hold of us and we enjoy it.

RT It is the effect of the gospel. The gospel is not only a gospel of relief but it is that God has delivered us. He says, "Let my son go, that he may serve me", Exod 4: 23. The gospel is to take us from the circumstances of bondage and bring us into the liberty of being one of the sons of God. That does not happen in one preaching exactly. But the light of it needs to be known among us that it is God's thought about us. It says, "God conducts himself towards you as towards sons", Heb 12: 7. Even if God has to bring discipline into our lives, He does not forget that that is what you are in His sight. He would

encourage us to have a conscious sense that this is what we really are, one of God's sons.

WMG Is it important that not only are we sons but He has "sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts"? You might adopt a child, but you cannot put the right spirit into him, but God has done that, so we have the right feelings towards the Father.

RT Well, it says, "because ye are sons …" He thinks so much of us that He regards us in that light and in that relationship, that He has now given us the feelings and the power that are suited to the relationship so that we need not fall back on other principles. We do not fall back on the world for support, for our entertainment, or for joys or for anything. God has given the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. He has given us the resources to enjoy the fulness and sweetness of the relationship.

JM Is it a relationship of love?

RT Yes it is. It is the Father, God, who only could have proposed such a thing. Again as Mr Darby says, 'And, is it so?' Think of a love that would have us in the house in such dignity and in such liberty.

JM I feel impressed with the greatness of the liberty that we are brought into, but being more conscious of the love of the Father would increase our liberty.

RT I think it would and also preserve us from falling back on formality. The conscious sense of the relationship would give us to be in the joy of the house and give increased wealth in the response.

DBR Why do you think it is contrasted to children in this section? In verse 3 it says, "So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage … but when the fulness of the time was come".

RT Do you think it is that God would have us to be in full maturity? It is something that we could do with developing so that in the circumstances and the environment we may be in,

we are helped to get beyond any element of bondage, to be in the full liberty and joy of the house. What is your impression?

DBR Would that idea of maturity be involved in the term here, "but when the fulness of the time was come"; as if this was really what God has been operating in view of during the whole period of time?

RT Yes, you get some impression that God has been waiting for this and that was so at the incoming of Christ. It says, He "sent forth his Son". Think of Him sending Him out into those circumstances and all the opposition that was there: "God sent forth his Son", into that realm of criticism and opposition to display something of what His thoughts were for men.

JS Would it especially bear on the light given to Paul? It is clear that the other disciples had a certain knowledge of Him —Peter had, but he did not actually minister it. I am just trying to get into my mind that, laying hold of in our souls the light of Christ where He is, would bring us into the liberty of it.

RT I think Paul is dealing primarily with the reproduction of that Man above in the circumstances of the local assembly where the enemy is so active to bring in bondage and to hold the saints short of their calling. So Paul says, He "was pleased to reveal his Son in me", Gal 1: 16. Think of Paul, as we have said already, in these circumstances in the local company in Galatia, the divisions there were in Corinth, bringing in heavenly light among them.

JDG It is remarkable that we are sons before we receive the Spirit—we need to grasp hold of that; "by faith in Christ Jesus" is in relation to that Man, then God gives us the Spirit. Is that for us to enjoy our sonship?

RT It is a very remarkable thing and not something that perhaps we have thought much about. What would you say about it?

JDG I am just impressed by what you have brought before us that, through faith in Christ Jesus, I can look on myself as a son of God, but then He sees the need to give us the Spirit of

His Son in our hearts. It must be to bring us into the enjoyment of it.

RT It is to open the doors of the house, to be there in full liberty, but I think what you have called attention to is needful for us all to realise, that God's thought about us is that we are sons.

JDG That changes your outlook on life. It brings you into dignity. You belong to the royal family, you might say.

RT It changes too the liberty you have, that you are one of God's sons. Well, has that really laid hold of me? Would I go into circumstances that may bring me into bondage?

RG Is what has been referred to borne out by the fact that it is "by faith in Christ Jesus"; it is not 'in Jesus Christ'. We have come to recognise, through the gospel in our initial stages, the glory and wonder of what Jesus Christ has done for us—that Man—but do you think the next step is here in Galatia where it is Christ Jesus, the anointed Man, the glorious Man who is filling God's universe, you might say, and as we are taken up in the dignity of that, we might understand something of sonship?

RT And He is the Man who is the centre of all God's promises. "By faith in Christ Jesus": It takes you beyond the scene of time. It connects your affections with a Man in another set of circumstances and that faith God honours, and says, you are one of My sons.

DBR "God sent forth": has that a very wide bearing in that way? It is over against perhaps the Jewish system, which was restricted. I wondered if God sending out would be in correspondence to the position Christ has taken in His presence.

RT These are two cardinal features of the time we are in: "ye are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus" and then "God has sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts". They need to lay hold of us, that whatever else there is in the dispensation, these two things show the way that God has operated to reach His end in men, how He has dignified them

in bringing them into this family and has also given them the feelings and the affections and the liberty that are suited to the relationship. He has sent it out. How liberal God has been! What resources have come into operation that the glory and beauty of sonship may be laid hold of by us?

CKR Help us to see the value of the truth of redemption and reconciliation. You are bringing forward a very exalted but very wealthy line of things, but underpinning it all must be these truths as well.

RT I think it is like the boards of the tabernacle standing in two sockets of silver. It is like persons in the gain of faith in Christ Jesus and in the gain of redemption. What dignity and glory was on these boards! I think that is some type of the persons who are in the gain of all that has been introduced. God has come in in redemption to meet all liabilities that were there and all the things that may lay claim upon us, that we may have the full joy of the light of this dispensation.

CKR Would the fervency of the cry of "Abba Father" in the power of the Spirit bring out the good and gain of these things in the soul of the believer?

RT I think so. So there is a great issue from realising that we have been brought into this realm of sonship, as you say, going out to the One who has been the blessed source of it all.

GCMcK I was thinking of what has been referred to, "God sent forth his Son … that he might redeem those under law". Every claim has been met. Even the law itself, which had a claim, that is removed. You can see how it paves the way for complete liberty and the new view of things.

RT It is very beautiful. As we said earlier, God purposed this before time began, but think of the way that He has done it: "Out of Egypt have I called my son", Matt 2: 15. There they were, slaves in Egypt, and there is a great attempt by the devil today, dear brethren, to bring the saints into bondage through many things. The enemy would be active to bring us under slavery and tribute, but God has operated in redemption in the power of His love, and in the gift of the Spirit, that this feature of sonship may not be negated or the function of it wane, but

the joy and the power of it may be known in present circumstances.

JS In John 10 the Shepherd led them out by virtue of His own attractiveness. Would that be somewhat akin to this? The leading them out, redeeming those from under law. The fold was like that—it was restrictive—but the attractiveness of Christ lays hold of us. It leads us out. We go in and out and find pasture.

RT Very good, so that in Bethany they made Him a supper. There were persons there who were brought into the dignity and the joy and the liberty of being at table with Christ. This is where sonship is leading us, with power to meet responsibilities in sonship. We do not just meet them as getting through the exercises. I think the dignity and the power of sonship come into our exercises so that they are met righteously and fully and so persons are in true liberty to be in the joy of the Father's love.

WL It was mentioned earlier about children. Say something about the difference between children of God and sons of God. It might not have been too well understood.

RT I think children refers to the place we have in the family as proving the Father's care. The Father's feelings go out to the children and He takes account of our needs: children have to be fed, and clothed. But there are other aspects of course. John has children who come on to the border of sonship, you may say, when he uses that term. But in Galatians the idea of children is that we are not yet in the full liberty, not grown up. There is still something to learn. But I think in sonship God has given us the full run of the house and the dignity to be there for His own pleasure and joy.

WL It is quite a test to realise what you say, that we are always sons no matter in what circumstances we are. That might not be fully realised with us and would bear very much on our conduct and be a basis for acting as sons in the service of God, do you think?

RT I think the two things go together. I feel myself—I am not speaking critically—but we are far more familiar with the

term of sonship than with the practice of sonship and we need them both. We "are all God's sons by faith in Christ Jesus" and we enjoy what it is to sing those hymns and to take our place in sonship, but it does not just last for a Lord's day. We are sons of God on Monday. Think of sons praying in the prayer meeting, sons speaking in the temple, sons at their work who have a conscious sense that there are sons of God. Your work will be different from that of those around you. Would you go on strike? A son of God would not be bound by those things that come into the workplace. Would you be in an association? It is far below our dignity to be enslaved by the things that men bring in and the ordinances that pervade society. A son of God is able to meet these things righteously but he meets them in the glory and the dignity and the enjoyment of being in the love of God.

DBR I was wondering if sonship practically would be conveyed in the proverb. It says, "A wise son maketh a glad father", Prov 10: 1. We would like to make our Father's heart glad in everything we do. Would that be a practical application?

RT How beautifully that was seen in Jesus: "my Father". And there He is as He comes into the temple: "my Father's house", John 2: 16. Think of the way He was activated as seeing what was brought into that temple: "my Father's house"! I think it gives us some sense of seeking to please Him. If we enjoy the favour that has been conferred upon us —we will see that in Mephibosheth—we would seek in the circumstances of daily life to hold things at the level of our relationship. We would not want anything to disturb the enjoyment of that relationship. The relationship cannot be broken but we may allow something to disturb the enjoyment of it.

JAB Romans and Galatians speak of crying or saying, "Abba Father". The only reference to the Lord Jesus using these words is in pressure in the garden in the night in which He was delivered up. Would you comment on that, please?

RT I do not know that I could say much about it, but in the very pressure of circumstances that were so testing, think of

Him saying these words, 'Abba Father'. It shows what was in His heart, so that testings and circumstances bring out whether we are a son and whether we are in the enjoyment of sonship or else they turn us to beggarly principles. That is what happened in Galatia. Pressures came into their lives and they turned to beggarly principles. So in our practical circumstances God tests His own work. What is our recourse? Do we remember that we are a son of God, therefore we count on the resources that He has given us in His Spirit to fulfil matters so that we are in full liberty to say, 'Father, Father'.

JM The young man in Luke 15 says, "I am no longer worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (v 19), but the Father says, "Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it", v 22.

RT That is the importance of what I was saying as to the light of sonship. We can never fall back to being a hired servant although we may take that ground at times. Difficult circumstances come into our pathway and we say, 'Well, my sins are forgiven. I am saved and I will go to heaven'. But persons in the light of sonship will never speak in those terms. The light of sonship coming into our souls is that we want to please the Father, and in doing that we are proving the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts.

RJC I was thinking of Luke 15. Do you get the contrast there between a son enjoying the divine presence and the elder son outside?

RT Well, he had never grown up.

RJC The father did not call the elder son a son: "Child, thou art ever with me", v 31.

RT He did not know his father and perhaps in our experience it has needed exercises like the prodigal to bring us back to see what the Father's thoughts about us were. That robe was there when he was in the far country. He still regarded him as a son, and, in the exercises of the way, God never changes His thoughts about us, but He would encourage us, I think, to see that He has given the power and the resources, the wherewithal, that we may be in the

consciousness of the enjoyment of the relationship. It just tests our hearts: how much is the relationship enjoyed by us during the week and in the circumstances of daily life. Do we resort to living like ordinary people who are living in the flesh and being carried about by various circumstances that test us, or are we consciously in the sense that we have been brought into the full liberty and joy of the dispensation as a son of God and given the Spirit of His Son in our hearts?

DBR Someone referred to changing your outlook; I think it would also change our taste. If we were really in the enjoyment of sonship, it would change our taste. You were speaking about things that are testing, but it might be things that are pleasing that we give way to, what is pleasing to the flesh. I wonder if that is really Romans 8; "but if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live", v 13. Would that be the life of sonship?

RT I think so and the Lord's words, "I do always the things that are pleasing to him", John 8: 29. As you say, there are many things that may please us, places that we may be drawn into and things that may attract us, but is it the way that a son of God would behave? But he says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God". I think the leading of the Spirit of God is forward, leading to the land. That section in Romans 8 is the antitype to Numbers 21 where they come, through the brazen serpent, to a springing well and from that moment they journey forward into the land. I think that is what is happening here: "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God". So it is not only that you are a son of God as that name having been named upon you, but you are led: "these are sons of God", persons who are walking in a different path, walking under divine direction and leadership of the Spirit.

WL This does not contradict Galatians—"ye are all God's sons by faith …", but is this something further, "these are sons of God"?

RT I think this supports Galatians. In Galatians we get the light of it and we need the light of it. I think it liberates our younger brethren, and it needs to come into the gospel. The

light of the present day is not only that our sins are forgiven, but we are called to sonship, and now how is that going to be worked out? Well, it brings us into another relationship; it brings us into being led by the Spirit of God.

WL "These are sons of God", would that be characteristic?

RT So they are identifiable. You can see them. As has been said, they are not drawn by their own desires, but they are led by the Spirit. Now, where is the Spirit of God moving? Well, He is moving among the people of God. It brings us into an area of protection and of forward movement through this world. It says, "these". As our brother read it, he emphasised that, "these are sons of God". So they are seen to be sons of God.

DS-I In chapter 7 you despair, "O wretched man that I am!" (v 24), but in chapter 8, you come through to saying, I am a son of God. Mr Darby wrote his hymn in the singular—

And is it so, I shall be like Thy Son?

RT I think the fact of it laying hold of us draws us into this realm and casts us on the Spirit. How are these features of my high calling going to be displayed? Well, it says, "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God". The substantiality of what we were reading of in Galatians is seen in these persons who are moving forward to the land. I think a son of God does not walk aimlessly. He has an objective and that objective is pleasing the Father, but it is leading on to the land, the area of divine blessing where the thoughts of God are enjoyed, and, I think, it leads among the saints.

JS Is that why he uses the pronoun, "we". In the previous chapter it is "I", but here it is the collective thought. What would you say about that?

RT I think it is very good to call attention to that. It is very much enjoyed collectively. The resources of it are proved individually, but think of a company of the sons of God being together! What an occasion it would be! This scripture brings in the power of the relationship seen in persons, "these are

sons of God". So what we had in Galatians is not a picture on the wall, not an abstract idea, but the light of it is something that becomes concrete in the soul, that "these are sons of God".

RG Mr Darby's hymn was in the singular as was said, and there is that individual exercise that brings us into the knowledge of our place in sonship, but immediately then the Spirit brings us into communion with others so we enjoy what sonship brings us into together.

RT So that they moved into the land together?

RG That is what I wondered, that it is not an individual exercise then. The individual exercise is something that is basic, you might say, as light dawns in your soul, but then immediately the Spirit comes in and fills you with an appreciation that there are others who have had the same exercise and are now enjoying the same blessed place that God has prepared for them.

RT I think it is very fine to have some experience of that. They are led by the Spirit of God. It means He is made room for. That was Numbers 21. They were sons of God in Egypt—"Let my son go, that he may serve me"—a long time in coming to it, but in coming to that springing well, they were unified and they began to sing. Above all things they made a forward movement towards divine purpose. I think there would be a definitiveness about the sons of God so that they are not just believers—they are that—but they are sons of God as led by the Spirit; they have an objective and there is a definiteness in their movements towards that objective.

RJC What is collective comes out in their response too, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father". There seems to be a suited state, formation in the believer in sonship, so together we can cry, "Abba, Father".

RT That is a very beautiful expression of deep feeling and it is something which has been pent up in the son's soul, you may say, and there comes a point when we cry, "Abba, Father".

RJC In Galatians it is the Spirit that cries, but here there seems to be some formation in sonship in the believer so that

we can cry. We come into the full enjoyment of sonship in that relationship.

RT I think it brings up the close link there is with the Spirit. It is like, "the Spirit and the bride say, Come", Rev 22: 17. The Spirit is crying, as you say, in Galatians but here there is a close link with the Spirit and we cry, "Abba, Father". The expression is full of an admiring kind of spirit in the soul, "Abba, Father".

RG This is the only company that uses the terms, "Abba, Father", for all eternity.

RT You had better say more about that.

RG It is just what we have learned. There are other families in heaven and other families on earth, but none of them will be able to use the words, "Abba, Father". It is only those that have understood the depth of feeling that was expressed in Christ as He came here and did what He accomplished, and then the Spirit coming and filling those that are sons in this relationship, that will be able to use these two words, "Abba, Father".

RT I think what you say magnifies the dispensation. The assembly now knows sonship into which we have been brought in a fuller way than any other family. Angels know something about it, and Israel will know something about it. In fact, they had it first, "whose is the adoption", Rom 9: 4. But here, what grace, what an expression of the Father's heart of love, that we, outcasts and strangers like Mephibosheth, have been brought into this time of sonship and into the joy of it that exceeds what will be in any other family!

GCMcK Does it help to see that it is not a formal word for Father. It is a simple, intimate word. Is that touching to the heart?

RT Very good, so they are two different languages, are they not? You may say, in whatever language, they all have the same Father. They are brought into this—it is not translated—simple liberty and joy. It is an expression of deep devotion, is it not?

DBR Say what your impression is as to how the Spirit would lead.

RT It is past Romans 7 here. I think the Spirit comes to a point where He does not need to contend for His place. That takes a long time in our lives, and it is never absent in a sense, but I think we come to a point where the Spirit is in the lead instead of the flesh, instead of, as you say, desires for some things that may not be spiritual. The Spirit has a greater sphere of influence in our hearts so that we are ready to follow into the realms of divine blessing.

DBR That is helpful. Chapter 6 deals with the world and chapter 7 deals with ourselves. It involves the clearing of things inwardly, making way for this. Do you think it might be something like following the man with the pitcher of water? I wondered if ministry would be one way in which the Spirit would show His leading. There would be other others, no doubt, but do you think that would be right?

RT Yes, and he leads into a large upper room, furnished. So I think we need to be helped to afford the Spirit greater liberty. Does He need to be always contending for His place? It speaks about that earlier in the chapter, "For they that are according to flesh mind the things of the flesh; and they that are according to Spirit, the things of the Spirit", Rom 8: 5. There comes a time in our lives when we are giving Him greater place. He is not contending for it, but He is able to open up the treasures of His Master, to lead us into that heavenly land where we are brought in the spirit to liberty to cry, "Abba, Father".

WL I am just enquiring, but when we come to the service of God, it is not exactly the leadership of the Spirit, is it? It is a question of the Lord's headship and His leadership as Minister of the sanctuary, although the Spirit's service would complement that, do you think?

RT Well, would it not be the Spirit's leadership first, do you think? Go on, say what you mean.

WL Just that. He would lead us to the heavenly land where the Lord as Head can take over in the service of God.

RT Though, prior to the Supper, I think the Spirit has a great place with us. As we know, we say we break bread in the wilderness, so this is wilderness: "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God" would be wilderness exercises. But I think that makes room for attraction, makes way for the Lord to have His place and the Spirit's prominence would recede in that sense. It recedes as the Lord takes over, and the Son has His place, bringing us into the realms of the Father's love.

WL "If therefore the Son shall set you free, ye shall be really free", John 8: 36.

RT I think it is very affecting to have some sense in what we are saying that we are in the hands of divine Persons.

JDG In Numbers 21 they moved from the springing well to the top of Pisgah. I was thinking how the Spirit brings you to that point where you can view the whole land. This gives you a view of that before you come into it.

RT As you say, it looks over the land, but verse 20 says it "looks over the surface of the waste". So you come to a point where you can look back and you do not see the murmurings but you look back and see the way God has led you.

JDG In Numbers 21 it "looks over the surface of the waste", but in Deuteronomy, when Moses is taken up, he sees the whole land from that point.

RT I am glad you have brought that in because I think that is just what we are coming to in sonship. We are coming to Deuteronomy. And it has been said Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy to teach them manners (J Taylor vol 12 p455), and that is what sons are, they are mannerly. They have the manners of the house; they move in the dignity of the house. So think of Moses writing that book: he knew them well. He says, Ye are the sons of Jehovah, in that book. He tells them that is what they are. And he wrote the book so that they might be in the land in the full liberty and the joy of the Father's love.

JDG Know how to live in that land.

RT Know how to live in it, know how to drink those streams, know how to live in a house that you did not build. I think that is what sonship brings us into. The way that Moses speaks of the land, I think, is most beautiful. He says you will drink of wells that you did not dig, you will live in houses that you did not build, you will eat of trees that you did not plant but there is sonship coming into the house. But the leadership of the Spirit makes us suitable, as you say, to have the manners of the house.

JM You referred to the wilderness. It says of the Lord Jesus that He was "led by the Spirit in the wilderness", Luke 4: 2. That footnote is 'in the power of' it.

RT And there in those circumstances, He was a son. "Man shall not live by bread alone". Think of the circumstances! Think of sonship coming out in those temptations! Very beautiful! The devil says, you could call that stone to be bread. He says, "Man shall not live by bread alone". Think of a Son there! How pleasing that must have been to heaven, tempted of the devil in those circumstances, but there is sonship shining in its fulness.

WMP Can I ask about 2 Corinthians 3 where it is "transformed … from glory to glory", v 18. There does not seem to be any discontinuity there. I wondered how the service of the Spirit might lead us into the knowledge of the headship of Christ. Can you help as to that passage?

RT I think that links on with what has been said as to Numbers 21. There is a chapter in Numbers (chap 33) where it says they went from one place to another. It does not say anything about what happened in some of these places, some terrible things, but it says they went from one point to another point. They were led of the Spirit. As you look back on these things, how God led them forward, and as they come to Numbers 21, the pace is accentuated. They begin to run, not just walking:

On to Canaan's rest still wending (Hymn 76)

They get some sense of the power there is to traverse those circumstances quickly and come into a land where sonship can flourish.

CKR Here again in Romans 8, "… ye have received a spirit of adoption". It would imply an intelligence but also entails fulness of heart, the full result and known power of the indwelling Spirit therefore taking the believer forward.

RT That is very fine. It comes in in both Galatians and here, that ye might receive it. You receive sonship. God is imparting it in the wealth of His love and here too you are brought into this great realm of blessing: "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God". God does not just give us the title, but He gives us the resources so that no power should hinder us from crying, "Abba, Father".

CKR When you go on to chapter 15, you receive one another, v 7. That would all help us in our links together, do you think?

RT I think that is fine that the sons of God would gravitate to each other. So who are our companions? The sons of God? The company we keep, is it sonship? The company we keep has a great effect upon us and there is certain company we cannot avoid. Mephibosheth was in that. He was in a company he could not avoid, but he did not wash his hair or trim his beard. He kept himself apart from that company. He was there as a son of God. So I think we need to watch our company. "These are sons of God", not just persons who may profess something, but persons who express that they are led by the power of the Spirit.

WL Would Rebecca help there? A feature of sonship, "I will go" (Gen 24: 58), and that leadership of the Spirit there in type, and she had too companions on the way leading to the heavenly man.

RT Well, Rebecca makes full use of the camels, divine provision that God has provided in His love. I think she must have wondered what they were there for to begin with, but she saw that there was a power there to transport her into the embrace of the heavenly man. "These", persons that are led, "these are sons of God".

Well, may we just speak of Mephibosheth for a moment? He allowed sonship to lay hold of him. The thoughts of David about him were more than he could ever have imagined. He as much as said, I will just lead my life quietly. I will not cause any trouble. We say our sins are forgiven, we have a sense of how feeble we are, and would just take a back seat as it were, but that is not David's thought about him. He says, "thou shalt eat bread at my table continually". He allowed the wealth of sonship to lay hold of him so when the crisis comes, you see there a son, a son in adversity, a son displaying the features of sonship when all around were pleasing themselves.

JTB I was just thinking of that scripture you referred to in Deuteronomy 8 where it says, "thou shalt eat bread without scarceness", v 9. That is really the wealth of sonship that Mephibosheth comes into in David's house.

RT It is interesting what has come up as to the leadership of divine Persons and the Lord having His place and leading us to "eat bread at my table continually". That is where we are nourished. It is where sonship is nourished. There is nothing to nourish Mephibosheth in those other circumstances, but he is prepared to leave them. Are we prepared to leave the circumstances? The Spirit leading us would bring us from one set of circumstances into the enjoyment of another. So it says, "And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" But that did not hinder him from eating at the king's table continually.

GCMcK Is it touching that David said, "for I will certainly shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake"? Really, it is for another's sake that we come into all this. Does that assure it to our hearts, that really Christ has drawn this all out?

RT I have wondered about that.

GCMcK We had no claim for ourselves, but it is God's thoughts as to Christ and His value for Christ that lie behind everything.

RT That is very fine so you can understand him saying, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" But the wealth of David's affection for him

enables him to rise above the state of things though he felt it. Humility is always there, but he allowed the wealth of David's thoughts to lay hold of him, and he ate bread at the king's table.

DBR Is it a complete transfer in that way? It says he dwelt at Lodebar, as you were saying. Is that really what God intends for the believer that there is a complete transfer from one system into another system?

RT Yes, indeed, and to prove the resources of that system. Hannah says He has taken us from the dung-hill and set us among nobles (1 Sam 2: 8), and she proved the resources of that system in the bringing in of a man-child. And so Mephibosheth proved the resources of that system. Even when all around are despising David, he would not make himself comfortable where his lord was not. I think that is what is conveyed in that expression, he "neither washed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed". There is Mephibosheth in outward circumstances—his loyalty. This is another feature of sonship that they are loyal, loyal to the Father, and there is a man who was loyal to David. What pressures must have been put upon him! Mephibosheth, you can surely just do this! Very insidious the enemy's efforts to bring us away from the ground of true sonship.

RJC Was he settled in sonship? Thinking of what has been said, I was going to refer to verse 13 of chapter 9, "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem; for he did eat continually at the kings' table". We should come into that and be settled in sonship and that would govern our activities, as you have read later on.

RT It was the best place to be. It was where the thoughts of God's love were to be enjoyed, so it would connect with the local meetings, the best place to be, whatever night of the week it is. It is where the sons would gravitate. It is where the Spirit of God is leading us to, but it is where the sons would gravitate and he would not make himself comfortable in other circumstances because he showed he was loyal. Whatever

they were saying about David, he was displaying that he was loyal to the rejected king.

WL Does he show consistency too? Chapter 9 and then a long terrible history until chapter 19, and he is still loyal and consistent.

RT It is very fine to see a man like that. I think it has been remarked that he was one of the Ephesians of the Old Testament. The light had shone in his soul and wherever you put him, he is the same. He is loyal to his lord. He is a son of God. What this must have meant to heaven! David did not appreciate it in the setting of things, but what it must have meant to heaven to see persons who are not making themselves comfortable or adjusting their circumstances or their thoughts or their conduct to what is around them, but they are in the joy of sonship within, loyal to a departed Lord and Saviour.

RG That expression, "Let him even take all", signifies there is an area outside every other thing here in this scene, and that is where sonship is enjoyed.

RT Well, one feature of sonship is that they are satisfied and they find no greater pleasure than pleasing the Father.

DBR What has just been referred to really is typical of a man who has drunk of one Spirit, not only being led by the Spirit in the wilderness, but drinking of one Spirit. Would that be total satisfaction?

RT "Let him even take all": he had something better. We do not let things go unless we have something better. Well, the light of sonship has brought to us something better and the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts has given us the power to enjoy something better. Now, let us make room for that, that we may see that the world can confer nothing upon us and though there may be these exercises of maintaining loyalty, we have been brought into an area where we can be satisfied and live in divine favour.

GLASGOW

28th August 1999

List of Initials

J.A.Brown, Grangemouth; J.T.Brown, Grangemouth; R.J.Campbell, Glasgow; J.D.Gray, Edinburgh; R.Gardiner, Kirkcaldy; W.M.Grosse, Edinburgh; W.Lamont, Cumnock; G.C.McKay; Glasgow; J.Marshall, Edinburgh; W.M.Patterson, Glasgow; D.B.Robertson, Cumnock; C.K.Robinson, Glasgow; D.A.Steven, Grangemouth, D.Scougal, Edinburgh; J.Spinks, Grangemouth; R.Taylor, Kirkcaldy

MAKING ROOM

Malachi 3:15-18
Psalm 132; 1-8
Genesis 24: 15-25
Acts 16: 13-15

In reading these scriptures, it was on my heart to say something of how God, in His faithfulness, has made room for the testimony and the light of the assembly to grow and, on the other hand, the need on our side to be making room for God to work, that Christ may have a resting place, making room for the Spirit of God in Rebecca and, finally, for Paul.

There is a great need for appreciating how God has operated against forces of evil to make room for the light of the assembly. It is a wonderful thing to me that for nearly two thousand years the light of the assembly has shone amidst the powers of darkness that have been against it and is still shining, we may say, still shining in its lustre. We sang in our hymn that there is a vessel here on this earth that is saying, 'Lord Jesus, come'. God has operated to see that through. The Lord says in the revelation that Peter had, "on this rock I will build my assembly, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it", Matt 16: 18. God has intervened Himself, dear brethren, to bring in this light—I should say, to bring in this formation, formed here in this dispensation, which is His own handiwork, and the building is going on today and it will go on until completion. God has made way for the assembly and assembly light. The powers that are against it are increasing. We hear these terms, 'other faiths', terrible expression. There is no other faith. There is one faith, and God has made that clear and He is making way for that in spite of these times of darkness. What an assurance to our hearts, what a privilege, dear brethren to be in the light and in the joy too of what God is seeing through and seeing through to completion! There is a need for our hearts in these darkening days to have a sense of that which God is seeing through. Look at the testimony in India, the powers of darkness and evil that are all around! Marvellous thing to think of the glad tidings being preached amidst such idolatry, persons holding the ground amid such

darkness, in loyalty to the name of Jesus! God is seeing the testimony through. What an encouragement to be identified with it, dear brethren! What an incentive to make room for it!

In the passage we read in Malachi, persons were saying it does not really matter. The book is full of what men say and what God says. Men are saying it does not matter; there are other faiths, we can serve God as we please; and the wicked are prospering. That is the day we are in. It says, "we hold the proud for happy; yea they that work wickedness are built up". Men would look at these things in an outward way, but amidst all that, there were persons who feared Jehovah. I would like to enlist us all increasingly to be more fully among them. Amidst the darkness the scripture is very beautiful: it says, "Then", as if God interrupts what men are saying and doing and thinking. The Spirit of God intervenes. It says, "Then", in the midst of such conditions, there were persons who feared Jehovah and they "spoke often one to another". That is the day we are in, dear brethren. It is what we are doing this afternoon, but may it not just be in our meetings! Amidst the darkness the great preservative—may I say, the great upbuilding for faith?—is that there are persons who speak "often one to another", no distance there! "They that feared Jehovah": It is the great need of the time when men are pleasing themselves and raising these other matters that I have spoken of, that there are persons who fear Jehovah.

It is a remarkable word of a great man, Joseph, "I fear God", Gen 42: 18. Did he need to, you may say? A man there who had the whole land of Egypt under his rule and dominion, and he says, "I fear God". Dear brethren, let us be preserved in the fear of God! We try to say it is not a slavish fear, but, you know, it is the normal condition of a heart that knows Him, "I fear God", not for what He will bring in judicially, not that there will be penalty if we do not do as He pleases. "I fear God" means you make room for Him. You make room for what God is saying and what God is doing and you make room for God's word amidst all that man is saying and man is doing.

"Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often one to another; and Jehovah observed it, and heard, and a book of

remembrance was written before him for them …". Did He really need that book, you may say? God had great pleasure in these persons that feared Him. Think of Him writing them down! Can I ask, my friend, are you conscious that your name is in that book? I do not speak fancifully, but I can think of God looking over the pages of that book in the darkening days that we are in and seeing one name, another name; and He comes to your name, sees something of persons there who walk in a different path, who are governed by different principles, opportunities perhaps to do one thing or another. "I fear God". That was Joseph. He had an opportunity to bring in retribution. How rightly he might have done it! How rightly he might have been vindictive against those brethren that so persecuted him. He says, No: "I fear God".

A mark of a God-fearing man is that His confidence is in God. He does not need to try and justify himself. He does not need to take up the cudgels and to try and make a war against any that may be against him. He goes on quietly in confidence that God, the Judge of all the earth, will settle matters in His own way and His own time. In the meantime, we are tested in our confidence in God. Think of the rising tide of things that are abroad today against the name of Christ, persons who wear the cloth, as we speak, with no fear of God in what they say. It should break our hearts as we hear these expressions against the Name of our Saviour and against the truth of Christianity that this country in some way used to respect. It should cause us grief to hear the things that are being said today, if we fear God. Would that these men feared God! Would that we were able to leave these matters, feeling them, but it says, "Then they that feared Jehovah spoke often", holy conversation in the things of God. I believe it would increase as the darkness increases; in the pressure of circumstances, you can think of these dear brethren meeting one another—"spoke often one to another … and a book of remembrance was written". They were not speaking just about the public things although they felt them. It is like these sons of God gathering together and speaking of the things of Christ and God writing this book of remembrance. It says it was "for them". God has these books and, as I say, He looks them up.

Maybe, dear brother and sister, you are passing through now things that you can hardly understand and sorrows that you can hardly bear, and God looks at that book. He says, there are persons who fear me. He comes in in His mercy. As we fear Him and make room for Him, He comes in in His grace and in His love for these persons.

It says the book was written "for them that feared Jehovah, and that thought upon his name". This is how the testimony has gone through, dear brethren. That is how the history has gone through in this city and this country. There are persons who have feared God and that book of remembrance has been written and we stand here today on the ground of the faithfulness of others who have gone before us. Let us, dear brethren, follow in those footsteps in a true way, in a committed way, in the fear of God, speaking often one to another! It makes room for divine blessing. Amidst the darkness, these persons made room for God to come in, made room for Him to come in with the resources of His love.

He says, "And they shall be unto me a peculiar treasure". Oh what delight heaven has in the loyalty of the saints! No great exploits in this chapter. It is not David's mighty men. It is you and me, insignificant persons in the world, of small account in the ways of men, but persons who fear God and speak often one to another and think upon His Name. Could anything be simpler, dear brethren? Could anything be more blessed? It is within the reach of the youngest heart in this room to have some sense of the fear of God in this way that we are speaking of it and to come into the blessings of His love. I say it is the way that things have continued to this day because there have been persons who have made room for God through their faithfulness, and He says, "And they shall be unto me a peculiar treasure". Jehovah of hosts is speaking. This is a great stay to persons who fear Him, that God is over all. He is not limited to the limitations even of our faith. It is Jehovah of hosts.

He says, "and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son …". It connects with what I said as to God coming in for you in the circumstances and in the sorrows. He says, "and

I will spare them". He does not spare these worldlings. He does not spare the workers of iniquity. Their end is sure judgment, but of those that fear Him, He says, "I will spare them as a man spareth his own son…". Oh what affection is stirred in the heart of God from persons who fear Him and think upon His Name!

Well, I speak of David only briefly, as a young man who began to think about Christ, and to make room for Him. The Psalm is very beautiful, as is David's history, but it says here about the ark, which is typical of the Lord Jesus, that "we found it in the fields of the wood". This is where David found it. Could he not just have left it there? It had been there a long time. The connection of the passage would seem to be with the house into which the ark was carried. The ark had been in the hands of the Philistines and there was a movement of recovery begun, but God had to speak against it, not entirely, but God had to bring in some corrective measures, and the ark was carried aside. It says it was there a long time. If you look at that passage of scripture the comment of the Spirit of God while the ark was there is that "the time was long", 1 Sam 7: 2. Oh, how God has felt it, the place that the public position has given to Christ, the ark that had led them through the wilderness! God called them out of Egypt, but the ark led them through the wilderness into an inhabited land. Beautiful expression! The ark was there leading them until they came to a land where there was room for them and there it is, carried aside to a house where it was neglected, and that is where things are today, dear brethren: the ark, the Lord Jesus, is outside neglected.

And here is a young man who heard about it, a young man who heard that the ark was lying in the fields of the wood. It was neglected and he says, "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 …". Oh that the Spirit of God would stir something in all our hearts today to find a place for the ark to have rest! Is it in your heart? That is where it began, in David's heart, a young man as I say who might have said, Well, it is not my matter, a young man who might have left things as they were, but the Spirit of God so stirred

him in his affections for Jesus. He says, I will not give rest until there is a settled place. It began in his heart and it ended in the glory of Jehovah filling the house of God in Solomon's day. May it stir in your heart to give a place to Jesus! In Laodicea it says He is knocking. He stands outside, knocking. Has that been your case? It has been in mine. It has been in most of our histories, I suppose, but that knocking makes way. He says, "if any one hear my voice", Rev 3: 20. Have you heard His voice, wanting to come in? I trust you will not keep Him out any longer, like that one in the Song of Songs; He could not get in at the door. He had to look through the window. Is that your only acquaintance with Christ? Is there something between you and your Saviour from your side? The door in Laodicea, somebody must have put it up. Has some barrier come into your life between you and Christ? He is knocking and, too, He is speaking. "If any one hear my voice": do you not recognise it? The one in the Song of Songs recognised it at first, until she comes to a point where there is something awakened in her affections through some appeal of the sufferings of Jesus, I think. There is something awakened in her affections and she rises and opens the door and she goes through certain exercises until she finds Him.

Well, David here, he says, "… we heard of it …" and he says, I am not going to leave things like that. It may be we cannot alter it, but there is a young man here who says that his affections are so moved that he will do what he can and he prepares in his affection and he prepares in his affliction. His energies are bent on gathering up very small things, it may be, tested at every turn. The public position was so against him. You say, what can I do? A poor shepherd lad, a Saul on the throne who would be content to put things off and to discredit the testimony. There he is, room made in his heart, and in his life, and there he is gathering up, in these times of deep experience, substance, that the ark may have a resting place, not only in his heart, but a settled place. It is a very beautiful touch that comes in in Solomon's time, based on this very activity of David. The ark has a settled place where the Lord does not need to knock to come in. He may come in as we sing the first hymn. I like to think of these sentiments expressed

as the saints sing the hymns, as the Lord Jesus in His grace brings in touches of His love. As He hears the saints singing to Him, His footsteps are hastened to come among them and find there a settled place, somewhere where He can ungird Himself, where He can speak of His Father's love, where He can speak of all the things that have been secured and settled from His position at the right hand of God.

As I say David in his affection, simple young man, made room, made a resolve. It is right to make resolves. It is right to seek grace to keep them. And David, I am sure, at times departed from his resolve. He felt the pressures of the way, turning aside at times, but he comes back. His heart was set on finding a resting place. Let us not give up when the tests come! When the exercises are raised, may we not give up! May it cause us to be all the more diligent to find a settled place where the Lord can be at rest amidst the darkening days that are around us! Well, may we be encouraged to make room for Christ! The old hymn we often quote—

Room for business, room for pleasure,
But for Christ the crucified,
Not a place that He can enter
In the heart for which He died.

Daniel W Whittle (1840-1901)

Solemn words, 'room for business, room for pleasure'. That would not be a son of God. There it is, a place made through David's exercises where He can enter. Oh the ark I suppose in those days was there in a room with a cloth over it, maybe referred to historically. I suppose there were some great stories told in that house about what the ark used to do, but they were all historical. A comment has been made that it may be we are more familiar with a historical Jesus than we are with a Saviour at the right hand of God. Very true! But David had living, fresh, daily links. He says in one of his Psalms, "One thing have I asked of Jehovah, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Jehovah, and to inquire of him in his temple", Ps 27: 4. There is the objective of a young man, "one thing". If there is one thing the enemy is active in today—and

partially successful—it is to bring in diversity of object. "One thing"—I commend it to the younger brethren. Great things are pressing in on us, I know. We have been there too. But there is a young man, "one thing". If you were asked what the "one thing" was, what would it be? Maybe tonight you should just answer that to the Lord. What is the "one thing" that you desire? Solomon was given the opportunity. Let us not think these things are fanciful! In your life God may give you the opportunity. What is the "one thing" you desire? He gave it to Solomon and He was pleased with it. How pleased He was with this young man, David: "One thing have I asked of Jehovah".

Well, I hasten to speak of Rebecca as one who made room for the Spirit. One thing that came into our reading today, if I may make such an observation, was the need for making room for the Spirit of God. The whole testimony is secured in Christ in glory. "For whatever promises of God there are, in him is the yea, and in him the amen, for glory to God by us", 2 Cor 1: 20. The promises will all be effectuated and fulfilled, but the enjoyment of them today is dependent on our relations with the Spirit. This is what comes out, in type, in Rebecca. I only call attention to certain things that the Spirit of God raises with her. There is one thing noticeable about her: she was in an area where the Spirit could find her.

It says she came to the well. The servant when he came in this chapter came to the well. It says he came outside the city. That is where the Spirit of God has come today. He has not come into the world to the religious circles of men. The Spirit of God today has taken a place outside the city. I wonder if you have found it. That is where these transactions took place because a young woman made it her business to go outside the city to draw water. She did not find her pleasures in what was going on in the city. You say, was that her job? She had a brother. Should he not have been away there doing that? There she was, a young woman and she went outside the city. Oh, dear brethren, may we be attracted into an area where the Spirit can have liberty with us to raise certain questions, but to allure and draw our hearts into a place where we can enjoy Christ without distraction!

I said David's longings began as a young man and entered into the house of God in Solomon's day. And here is a young woman. The history begins by her going outside the city and it ends as she is in the embrace of Isaac—union with Christ through the exercise of a young sister. Well, she went outside the city and that is where she comes into contact with this personage, and she calls him, "my lord". He is impressed by what he sees in her. The Spirit of God is attracted as He sees a young woman, a young brother, or old ones too, making some room outside the city, showing some interest in the ministry, having an interest in the testimony and how it is going, and the power to walk here in loyalty to Christ. The Spirit of God has great interest if He sees persons who have some of these interests in their heart and He is ready to bring out great things to lead us onward, to lead us inward, as I say, into the embrace, in type, of Christ.

And so he is attracted to her. He says, "Let me … sip a little water out of thy pitcher". Have you anything for Him? We want so much out of things. There is a great divine supply, but have you anything for the Spirit? A little sip is all He asks. Oh she had a great wealth for him! She says, "Drink, my lord!" You just envisage it, a young woman there and here this personage asks for a sip, and how ready she is to pour out some of her exercises, some of her joys, not what is going on in the city, but she is there outside the city ready to serve him some refreshment for his heart. It gives him great liberty. I ask you to read the chapter in the light of what we are saying to find the liberty the Spirit has to bring out, His thought of Christ glorified.

I only wanted to say this, that He raises certain questions with her. He says, "Whose daughter art thou?" When He raises these questions, can you tell Him you belong to the household of faith? "Whose daughter art thou?" What an answer he gets! He sees that she belongs to the great divine family. She has not got a history of what is going on in the city. She belongs to the family. He raises two questions, "Whose daughter art thou?" "Is there room … for us to lodge?" He is raising these two questions with us today, I am sure. Do you know whom you belong to? Are you conscious that you

are a son of God, that God in His mercy, in His love, purposed as we remarked already, even before the world's foundation. But in time He has operated in redemption and in His love and in His Son to bring us into the divine family. Do you know whom you belong to? She moved in the full light of being of the household of faith. What a joy the Spirit had when he heard who she was. The chapter in another part says he was "astonished", he wondered; he worshipped God too, through one young woman coming out with a sip of water and telling Him whom she belonged to.

She says there is room, plenty of room. She had room to hear what he was saying. She was attracted by what he had brought out. What wonderful things he brings out in this chapter, things of gold, and things of silver, clothing, what beautiful things he brings out. Another old hymn we used to sing—

Oh worldly pomp and glory,
Your charms are spread in vain!
I've heard a sweeter story!
I've found a truer gain!

Samuel C G Küster (1829) (from German)

There is Rebecca, all the appeals of the city, what were they to her in the presence of that gold and silver and these articles of clothing? She says, I have room for these kinds of things. Have you room, dear brother, dear sister, for what the Spirit of God is bringing out today of Christ in glory? She had not yet seen Him, as we have not seen Him, but there is the Spirit of God telling us of the place that Christ has above.

There is a wonderful touch to the overcomer in one of the assemblies. It says, "To him that overcomes, to him will I give of the hidden manna", Rev 2: 17. Very fine food, the Father's appreciation of the manhood of Jesus! I think the Spirit brought something of that typically to Rebecca. That is what he did. He said, my master has an only son and he has given all that he had to Isaac. Think of the Spirit bringing that out to the heart of this young woman, telling her of the Father's delight in Jesus. Have you made room for it, dear brother, dear sister? As you prepared tonight to make room for it, to

give yourself to what the Spirit is unfolding? Oh, there are voices, you may say, voices that may be legitimate. Let us wait ten days. That seemed a reasonable request, did it not? You say, Well, I will put it off until I am a little bit older. I will do my own thing today, but I mean to make room for the Spirit. "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts", Heb 3: 7. The ten days would have been a hardening of heart, and the devil is doing that: "harden not your hearts". May those tender affections as displayed in this young woman find an expression. She says there is room. Then the question is raised, "Wilt thou go with this man?" And she said, "I will go", v 58. Oh, I can see, I can hear the servant's exclamation, as she said those words. I can tell you, dear brother or sister, there is joy in heaven, not only over repenting sinners, but there is joy in heaven over persons that are committed to going with the Spirit in the journey to Isaac.

You say, it is a long journey. How will we go? Mr Darby was faced with certain persons who were exercised about the truth. They said, we assent to what you are saying and it is very beautiful, but we have our livelihood. We have this and we have that. How can we do it? You know what he said? He wrote a hymn to them—

Rise, my soul, thy God directs thee;
Stranger hands no more impede;
Pass thou on His hand protects thee—
Strength that has the captive freed. (Hymn 76)

That would be for us all tonight, 'Rise, my soul …' The difficulties? There are camels there to meet them. Oh, what divine provision she comes in for as she says, "I will go". It says, "And Rebecca arose … and … rode upon the camels", v 61. Where are the difficulties for the camels? The journey long—

Though thy way be long and dreary,
Eagle strength He'll still renew;
Garments fresh and foot unweary
Tell how God hath brought thee through.

That is the operation of the camels, to conduct her into the embrace of the heavenly Man. Dear brethren, may I appeal to

myself and to us all to make room for the Holy Spirit of God and not in fleshly resolve, but in dependence, conscious of our weakness and dependence on Christ and the Spirit, to say tonight, "I will go". Three most precious words that are ringing in heaven as souls commit themselves to the Spirit of God.

I close in speaking of Lydia, another young woman. Again the similarities are very striking. She was outside the city, a young woman who up until then perhaps had thought she was a lost, helpless case, and yet the work of God was going on in her soul, and there she is: she was outside "where it was the custom for prayer to be". That is something that makes room for divine operations, prayer. The prayer meeting is a meeting where Lydia would be. She was among the brethren. She went outside the city I suppose. Speaking in our day, she would pass the cathedrals that might be nearer to her. She would pass other things that might have attracted her, but she went her way. She made her way past these things, outside the city by the river. She wanted something living, you see. She did not want just to trade on stories or what was historical. She wanted something living. And God sees her making her way to the prayer meeting. God sees her seeking to be in that company where there is exercise working and He hears such prayers. He hears them, more ready than we are to receive the answer.

It is a very telling incident a few chapters earlier. The brethren were praying for Peter and there he is knocking at the door and he could not get in. The Lord is very ready to answer our prayers, but it speaks about persevering in our prayer. That does not just mean repeating it, but it means being exercised as to how God comes in with the answer. I feel tested myself that what we pray for is often forgotten, but there were these persons praying for Peter, and God was operating very quickly. Before the prayer meeting was finished, He was working and they were slow to receive the results. That is not Lydia. Here she is at the prayer meeting, and there is Paul coming in. It says, "and we sat down and spoke to the women who had assembled". There is a certain dignity about the prayer meeting, a certain dignity about the saints making room, in faith, for the Spirit of God and for the Lord and for

God to work, and it says, “whose heart the Lord opened to attend to the things spoken by Paul”.

There is a great need today to attend to the things spoken by Paul. The Lord opened her heart. She already had those feelings and those desires and the Lord touched that heart to make room for Paul, to make room for the light of a man in heaven, and that settles the questions that may have perplexed her, that the Man who was crucified, the Man who had been rejected here is gone into heaven. Very fine word the way Peter speaks about Him: “who is at the right hand of God, gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to him”, 1 Pet 3: 22. Paul brought that light into this woman’s heart. The Man, the Saviour who had been rejected, there He is crowned with glory and honour. Well, she made room for the things spoken by Paul. They are put aside today. May our hearts be open “to attend to the things spoken by Paul”!

If David’s desires issued in the house of God with Solomon, if Rebecca’s desires issued in being in the embrace of Isaac, here a woman’s desires issued in the local assembly in Philippi, a young sister exercised to make room for Paul; and it made a fine assembly, the assembly of God in Philippi, where Paul was able to unfold some of these precious jewels about Christ, able to speak about the Man Christ Jesus with such liberty. May it be, dear brethren, through making room for Paul, our local assemblies are enriched and we are sustained, as making room of these divine things in the joy of our heavenly calling, for Christ’s Name’s sake.

GLASGOW

28th August 1999

LOVERS OF GOD

1 Corinthians 8: 3; 2: 8-10
Luke 2: 25-32, 36-38
2 Timothy 4: 8

It is quite a striking passage we began with—"if any one love God, he is known of him". You may say, and rightly, Does not God know everyone? He does, but the passage here is showing that there are persons who have become distinguished in God's eye—not through their knowledge. This passage deals with that, "knowledge puffs up" (v 1), but there are persons who I trust the Spirit will help us to speak of to encourage us, who become distinguished because of their love for God. This is open to every one of us. There may be degrees of knowledge in a right sense with us, but it is open to everyone, however young, or however old, to become distinguished in God's eye as being a lover of God. It shows that such persons are very precious to Him.

You may rightly wonder why we need to be stimulated to love God. It says, "God commends his love to us", Rom 5: 8. Not in creation—that does speak of Him—not even through prophets or the Scriptures—they all speak of Him—but "God commends his love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ has died for us". The writer of that passage almost struggled with the verse to understand it. He says "for the good man some one might also dare to die", v 7. He is thinking of these persons who have gone before, but he could hardly fathom a love that would come out to die for sinners. What reason was there for it? What cause was there for God to commend His love to sinners in such a way as that? No point in giving the law to sinners, no point in sending a prophet to tell them to mend their ways and do better. God commends His love, "in that, we being still sinners". After five years, after ten years, maybe after twenty years hearing the gospel, still sinners—God commends His love to us in that Jesus has died for us. What a commendation of love! Who could doubt it? May it remain with us all our days, the way that God has commended His love to us being still sinners.

That love has been commended to evoke an answer in our hearts, that we may be classed among persons who are lovers of

God. That is what the Lord is looking for. There are many persons in Scripture who we could speak of, distinguished like that. God says about Abraham, "I know him", Gen 18: 19. God at that point was going to come in judgment on Sodom. Speaking simply, He was wanting to tell someone what He was going to do, looking for someone to come and share His exercises about the state of things in the world, and He found that in Abraham, and He says "I know him". He told Abraham something about it. What a spirit it brings out in Abraham! How did He know him? He knew him because he had obeyed God. It is a very simple truth. He knew Abraham at that stage for his obedience. He was not yet the father of a line of faith; he was coming into that, but at that point God knew Abraham for his obedience. He had presented circumcision to him and He had called them out from the system of idolatry and Abraham had come out. He knew him for his obedience. It is a great feature of a lover of God, indeed it is a great feature of any lover, the love of obedience, the love that acts not seeking a reward, not seeking some answer, but a love that obeys because it is seeking to please the one that it loves.

There are many persons in scripture of whom God speaks like that, and He would stir our hearts at this time to be among them. I would like to make it simple. It is not through exploits. There are these things, but "if any one love God, he is known of him". May our hearts be drawn to be enlisted in that great company whom God knows, knows like this.

It says in 1 Corinthians 2 how great things He has prepared for them that love Him, as if our love for God is the entrance into the enjoyment of these wonderful things that God has prepared. I would like to speak of Caleb at this juncture. I think he fits very beautifully into this passage. He is distinguished in Scripture as one of the persons whom God knows and he comes into what this scripture is speaking of, the things that God has prepared for them that love Him. God, in Numbers 13, tells the children of Israel to go and search out the land (see Num 13: 1), He gives them some impression of the great things that God had prepared for them that love Him. Think of how far they went into the land. It says they came to Hebron to explore the great heights and depths of that land. None of them could dispute its beauty or its resources, the things that God had

prepared for them that love Him. How gracious of God at that very early point in their history to give them an insight into the great things that He had prepared for them. Oh that they had had a heart for it! What sorrows they would have spared themselves! Is that not true about you and me? What sorrows we may have spared ourselves had we made room for the great things that God has prepared for them that love Him. The nearer you come to God, the more you prove the riches of His grace. If you live on the circumference of things, you do not really prove the great things that God has prepared for those that love Him. But as you come into the circle of divine affections, as God was drawing them into in Numbers 13, you prove some of the resources of divine grace. Scripture speaks about that, "the riches of his grace", Eph 1: 7. There God was showing them something of it as He gave them insight into the land.

They spoke of the great things they saw, of the wonderful resources of that land, and they brought it back. Think of Moses' joy as he saw those grapes and heard the report. We have all heard the report. I trust the report comes to us constantly in the gospel, a report not only that Christ has died for our sins, but that there should be a report in the gospel preaching of the great things that God has prepared for them that love Him. Indeed the scripture speaks of that incident in Numbers 13 as glad tidings. In Hebrews it speaks of them having glad tidings presented, see Heb 4: 2. That was what Caleb and these others brought back and they said the land is very good—the things that God has prepared. How it held Caleb's heart through all the wilderness! He was living in something of the things that God has revealed to us by His Spirit. They are not left as something far off, that we are going to heaven in a day to come to enjoy them. It says the things "which God has prepared". What an expression of His love, that He has prepared them. At what cost He has made them available to us! We would never forget that, the lover would never be far away from the sacrifice of Jesus and the way He has gone. That has laid the basis for God to prepare these great things. It says, it has not come in to man's heart. You will never reach it by intelligence only, but Caleb reached it by obeying the glad tidings in that sense. He went into the land and he tasted of that heavenly fruit. May the blessed Spirit of God at this time stir our

hearts through some interest in what God has prepared for them that love Him. They are available for all, but they are enjoyed by them that love Him. How simple it is, not your knowledge or your ability, but it is there prepared.

It reminds you of the wedding feast. The king says, I have prepared my feast. The whole wedding supper was there ready, What a feast it was that he had prepared, oxen, fatted beasts! They were all killed, cooked ready to enjoy. That is what the king was saying, Come in. Alas there were few hearts to respond; those that should have responded made excuses. How readily we bring up excuses, but would that our hearts were drawn by His love, the appeal of His grace, to come in and enjoy the wedding, what He had prepared. I can think of Moses enjoying them. You say, Moses did not go into the land, but how he enjoyed it, that good land beyond the Jordan. It is very beautiful the way Moses speaks of it in Deuteronomy as the land that flows with milk and honey, the land of springs and water-brooks, the land of mountains. There was a man who had entrance into the things that God had prepared, not physically, but it was revealed to him by the Spirit, bringing it into our time—how great things God has prepared. Think of how he could bless the people at the end of his life telling them of that great land. He says, You will come into houses that you did not build, you will eat of trees that you did not plant—the great things that God has prepared for them that love him. Our hearts are far too slow to embrace something of these great things, but the Spirit would just touch us now with them, as it touched Moses to be able to speak of them, to be able to enjoy them. How he longed to go in, but he saw it, he had an insight into heaven with the saints in it. It says "God showed him the whole land", and mentioning the tribes in the land, he saw them, as it were, there dwelling. How his heart must have been full to think of the tribes there enjoying their inheritance, these same tribes that he had nursed through the wilderness. What patience he had spent upon them! Now God was giving him an insight into what their place would be in the land. How his heart was thrilled as he wrote that book, wrote Deuteronomy!

There need to be persons like that among us who have some insight, and I think that Simeon was like that. I would like

to speak of Simeon as a man in the locality who had an insight into the great things of God, because he was among those that love Him. It says, "there was a man in Jerusalem". Were there not thousands of others in Jerusalem? The city at that time was teeming with people, but it says "there was a man in Jerusalem"—"if any one love God, he is known of him". There are two people in this section, a man and a woman in Jerusalem, lovers of God who were known of Him. How fine that is! There are persons in localities, and the locality is known by these persons. It speaks of Bethany as the village of Mary and Martha, see John 11: 1. That is how the village was known. There were many other things about Bethany, but it was characterised by the lovers who were in it. That is how cities would be today in the divine view. May I raise the question—Are you among them? In your place, does God look on it and says that is the place where So-and-so is, one of my lovers? The man in Jerusalem. How precious he was to heaven, and he was known. God was looking for someone at this time in a city that was full of Pharisees, Sadducees and all the rest of them. "Knowledge puffs up". What a place Jerusalem must have been with all the ordinances, the rituals, the temple and all that was round about it. But there was a man in Jerusalem, someone ready to receive the Lord's Christ, a lover. That is how God communicates His mind to those that love Him. Here is this man, a simple man. We do not hear anything about Him before or after, but He is here, one of the most distinguished men in the history of time, a man in Jerusalem. There he is, the child Jesus in his arms. He was there in safe-keeping. There was the temple, the priests, yet all round about the cold and indifference but there was a man, a lover of God ready to receive the child in his arms.

This was not the first time God had found him. These things go on in secret, the man in Jerusalem had been there a long time. Anna had been a long time, despised, maybe not known, passed by the hierarchy of the day, but there they are, known in heaven, "he is known of him". It was divinely communicated to him by the Holy Spirit, something here that turned the whole system upside down, all professedly looking for the Messiah, paying these tithes and tributes and so on, but they are all passed by. There is the child Jesus in the arms of a lover,

it being divinely communicated to him that he should not see death before he should see the Lord's Christ. What exaltation filled his soul, what joy filled him! He was able to look far beyond what anyone else could see in Jerusalem that day. Think of the long history, these thirty three and a half years that would proceed after this. Simeon looked beyond all that. He saw in that child a "light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel". He saw the land, he saw right in to these great things that God had prepared. Simeon found his place in it. I do not know quite what that place would be, I suppose he will be in the family of Israel, but he saw beyond it all. He saw God's thoughts completed and secured in Christ. He had some insight into His death. I do not think that any one else had that at this time. He says "a light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel". That required the death of Jesus, His burial and resurrection and there is a lover given an insight in that dark day, into the great things that God has prepared for them that love Him.

There is Anna too. I would like to speak of the importance of persons in the place being characterised as lovers of God. It is the life of the local meeting. As God points out here, it is what He sees in the place, lovers of God, a place characterised by these two persons. It required them to be there. They are an essential part of these ways of God in the incarnation that there were these two people in Jerusalem who were able to have some insight into the great things that God was doing. It required that there were lovers, few there were it may be, but there were some there who were able to speak of Him. You would like to hear Anna speaking. You say the sisters do not speak in the meeting; no, but they can still speak of Him. Here is Anna making every opportunity. She had been known in the place, may be bypassed by the priests, ridiculed by others, but there she is, she went on. It says she "spoke of him". These are the characteristics of a lover. A lover cannot keep silent about its loved object: it would be a poor lover who never spoke about its object. You would question it. She spoke of him "to all those who waited for redemption in Jerusalem". It reminds you of the end of Malachi; the dispensation was fading, and in almost the very last chapter in the Old Testament it says they "spoke often one to another;

and Jehovah observed it, and heard" Mal 3: 16. Those that feared His name, and those that thought about Him.

May we be encouraged to take up these things. It is open to every one of us to be in this august company to know something of divine secrets, to have a view beyond what is around. You could not disturb Simeon. You might have said to Simeon, do not go to the meeting tonight, you were there last night you do not need to go again tonight. Think of what he would have missed. You could not keep a lover away. We should not need to be told that we should be at the meetings. The lovers gravitate there, it is the normal thing that you look for. I would expect of everybody, as they say their prayers in the mornings, that they are thinking of the meeting at night, thinking of the time of release from the daily round of things. That would be Simeon in the place. It must have been trying in Jerusalem at this time, but there it says, "came in the Spirit into the temple", a man in Jerusalem, just and pious. These are simple things, characteristics of a lover. The lovers of Jesus and of God, have very simple features about them. Also Caleb of whom we spoke, God says "he hath another spirit in him", Moses was known for his meekness. He was not known, in the way I am speaking of it, for the great things that he did in opening up the Red Sea and such things, but he was known among those that were meek. Love is formative. It is another great feature of a lover, they are conformed to the features of the loved One. Moses in his meekness, Caleb in the way that he embraced divine thoughts. It says, "my servant Caleb". I feel searched as I speak of these things. What can heaven say about you and me? We are just a member of 'the brethren'. Does heaven have some records? It has records, heaven has books. How wonderful to look at these books in a day to come and see names in them, and something written against the names. I wonder what God will write against your name and mine? It is open to us. These things are not fanciful. Heaven has its books and it speaks about names being registered in heaven, and as I have said already you can see that persons are known there for their qualities of meekness, obedience, and this man just and pious and Anna because she spoke of Him. Fine letters of commendation these persons would have—not that they preach well or they do this or that, but they

are known in heaven for these characteristics and features of Jesus that are shining in a dark day. Simeon regards himself as a bondman. Lovers would always take a low place—let thy bondman. He, you might say, was one of the most favoured of men in the race to have had the child Jesus in his arms. He says, let "thy bondman go … in peace". Love is never puffed up; love is ready to be in a place of service to the loved One. There are Simeon and Anna left in Jerusalem, as God has left you and me, who are to be known as lovers of God.

Paul, closing his days here in the passage we read in Timothy, is speaking of those who love His appearing. That would be another feature of a lover that they have an interest in the things of the loved One. You would not be a true lover of any person if you were not interested in their affairs, interested in the things that belong to them. Paul is speaking of persons who love His appearing. He was looking on to the day when the Lord of glory, the once despised Jesus, will be seen in all His majesty. As I read this passage it reminded me of Daniel, another great lover of God. You could say that Daniel was among those who loved His appearing. He lived in a very dark day and he felt the conditions that were around, the departure, the love of the most had grown cold, like our own day, and the day that Paul was writing of here. Men, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, Daniel's day was very much like that, but he interested himself in the things of God. It says about him that he understood by the books, see Dan 9: 2. He wanted to know something of God's ways, and he interested himself. It was not that he was a professor, he was not just one who professed to love Jesus and sang happy songs, but he was a man who interested himself in the things of God. He did it by prayer in large measure. To put it simply, he was in a day when persons were giving up things, but he saw that that was not the true way that God had been made known. As interested he saw there was a glory that was past, but he also saw that there was a day coming, another day. God tells him about these great kings, and these people that are suffering today, these despised Jews, God says, I have them all in hand. Daniel was concerned about the confusion that there was and wondered how to find his way amidst all the confusion and breakdown, and God, as he was praying, spoke to him,

addresses him by name—that would be a feature of those who were known in heaven—God addresses them by name. Perhaps, and I trust it is so, He is addressing you in this meeting. We are a company here and it is very easy to regard ourselves as one of the company, but God would speak to you directly. Here He addresses Daniel, by name and gives him an insight into the great ways of God, that Israel, that despised nation, and the despised saints of this dispensation, are soon to come into their place in the ways of God. God, as it were, said to Daniel, do not be overcome. He was almost overwhelmed by things as they were, but God says, I have it all in hand. So he was not overcome by the breakdown. He knew that things were going to proceed for a certain number of years, but he was looking beyond those years, he was loving His appearing. May our hearts be stirred to think of a day that is coming when the despised Jesus, the Lord of glory will come to be universally adored. What a day it will be when He comes into His rights!—

Yet wider praise in Zion waits for thee,
Her Lord and King.
Creation too in rest and liberty
Shall tribute bring (Hymn 75)

Think of the whole universe coming into the great realm of blessing already prepared for those that love Him. Paul was looking on to that, a man despised and set at nought by all that was around him. He says "Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present age", v 10. What a snare! A man who was a lover of Jesus, a lover of Paul too he had been, but he was deflected by the present age. How easy it is! We all know that in our hearts. He says "has forsaken me, having loved the present age". There he is, Paul alone, but he is looking and loving His appearing. May our hearts be stirred to look beyond the present time to be able to be restful as Daniel was that God had these things in hand. So God says to Daniel, "Go thy way, Daniel" (Dan 12: 9), "But do thou go thy way until the end; and thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days ", v 13. What a fine word God gives to one of His lovers, oppressed and feeling the confusion and the sorrows, "Go thy way … and stand in thy lot at the end of the days". Nations and kings will come and go, times and seasons will pass, but He says, "stand in thy lot at the end of the days".

God is seeing His lovers through, and is comforting them in the present sorrow and giving them rest in His love.

Paul would encourage us here—he says "not only to me, but also to all who love his appearing"—to look beyond the gloom, to look beyond the sorrows, to look beyond the weakness of our body, the smallness of our localities—to love His appearing.

We wait for it, and I believe that there should be greater longings in our hearts. It is not the rapture, wonderful and blessed as that will be, but what a time it will be for heaven and earth, for the saints, to see Him coming in His appearing, coming in all His majesty and His glory and the whole universe answering in tribute, glory and dominion, to the Lamb that was once slain. May we be encouraged, dear brethren, to increase in our love, to be among lovers of God. I trust I have shown that it is a very simple thing, something that goes on secretly, hidden it may be, and yet well known in heaven. Jude says "keep yourselves in the love of God", Jude 21. It should not be difficult. I often wonder why that had to be said, and yet I know. There in the apostasy rising, difficult days, is a very fine word that Jude closes with "keep yourselves in the love of God". It is all around us, it is in the local meetings, it is to be enjoyed in your own secret history: keep yourselves in the love of God. I believe that was like Moses' last words to the people, keep yourselves in the love of God. You could write that over these pages of Deuteronomy as he wrote to them. He knew their propensities to turn back, the kind of heart that was in them, yet in page after page in Deuteronomy he is encouraging them to keep themselves in the love of God, in describing that land that was soon to be their home—soon to be our home, soon we are to be there, soon to be in that august company in that glorious home and we will be there, lovers of God. May it increase, for His Name's sake.

LONDON

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Note - the reading on this occasion is in volume 4.