

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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GOD'S WAYS AND HIS PRAISE

Nehemiah 12: 31-43

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DAB We had some remarks in the reading yesterday afternoon about the rebuilding of the wall by Nehemiah, and the way it became a pathway for the choirs, and they led me to refresh my recollection of what it says about the choirs. I was struck when I read it, that whatever ways God's people take, whether in privilege or responsibility, they have in view, under God, that there might be oneness in His praise. That was an insight into God's ways which I thought we might share together. These other scriptures came to mind to confirm that thought. The God of endurance and encouragement is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and both thoughts lead to oneness. "Now the God of endurance and of encouragement give to you to be like-minded one toward another"; and "that ye may with one accord, with one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". And in Corinthians we have "we, being many" - which would speak of the diversity of God's people, of which there is a cross-section here. Part of that diversity is background, and part of it is experience, but we are one loaf, which is a wonderful idea to contemplate.

Those two things confirm the thought I had about the wall, and I would like to point out some things about these choirs, to prompt the brethren. I do not want to claim that I can explain what all these references might mean. I have found that young people are sometimes a little bit dubious at our attempts to put labels on pictures in the Old Testament - how do you know that this speaks of that? To use an example I have used before, how do you know that the thorn is a reference to the flesh? But these details will suggest things to the brethren. When I read verse 37, which is the route taken by the first choir, I thought it suggested ideas which might describe the kind of weekend we have had together. There has been a fountain, there is an ascent, we have drawn on what belongs to Christ, suggested in this reference to David, and so on. This route seems to suggest in a general way, which the brethren might be able to open up, the side of privilege. And it looks at the history of the journey of the children of Israel from a very happy and positive direction; in a sense it recalls their brightest days. So the route of that choir might speak of how those

bright days can be recovered.

The details in the journey of the second choir are rather different; there are furnaces, there is a prison, and there are towers, and so on. But it is not all negative, because there is a sheep-gate, which was the first one to be rebuilt. I thought the journey of that choir might relate more to the testimony, which comes with problems, exercises and sorrows; but it includes the gospel, and it includes the gathering in of souls, beneath their priestly care. All these things may be related to exercises of the way. I think I could show that this journey also paints the story of the history of Israel, including the prison gate; perhaps that represents the present state of Israel.

But then it says, "both choirs stood in the house of God". So these two routes move in opposite directions - one celebrating their privilege, the other recalling their responsibility in their testimony. Both sides of God's ways with them - for God's ways with us are not all exercise - brought them together in the house of God. There is an account here of the service that then proceeded. Is that intelligible?

WSC I think it gives us some interest because this second choir ends in the prison; and of Paul and Silas, who "in praying, were praising God with singing", Acts 16: 25. But I do not know how they got into the house of God: they were up on the wall.

DAB Well, the answer that fits my thought is that that was God's desire. We have in our hymn,

We shall be with Him where He is,
For such is His desire; (Hymn 144).

I was sharing with a brother yesterday references to the psalm where the Babylonians wanted the Israeli captives to sing, and there were good reasons to refuse, but they hung their harps on the willows, Ps 137. You might say they had to fend off the Babylonians, but how God must have felt the fact that those harps were silent: Israel as it were in the prison gate. And there is another psalm,

Praise waiteth for thee in silence, O God, in Zion, Ps. 65: 1.

That may correspond to a prison gate. What an interlude in God's ways with His people! How He feels that.

GMC Could you say that the house of God was in the choirs not the other way around? They obviously would not all fit in the structure that

had been built, but up on the wall the house of God was there.

DAB Yes; so the service did not depend upon them actually going in. That is a very good thought. It says that God dwells “amid the praises of Israel”, Ps 22: 3. In order for God to dwell in the praises of Israel, there has to be a uniting process. What impressed me is that all His ways with us, in which there is a blend of privilege and exercise, should be understood by us as intended by God to converge on that end. The reference, “we, being many” is to the diversity of the company; but the idea that the company should simply be forced into some kind of uniformity would not suit God; that is not His thought. He rejoices in the diversity; look at the creation, for example, and the wonder of it. But the thought that there is diversity does not mean that He has to accept a scattered answer. He is great enough and wise enough to bring all that together, and the Supper is a celebration of that: “we, being many, are one loaf”.

JFK I was wondering if it is important to remember that, before the choirs could even walk around on the walls the walls had to be rebuilt, there was a lot of collective effort that went into it. But just finishing the walls themselves was not the objective; there had to be the response to God. Is that helpful at all?

DAB Yes, I am glad you say that. We were recalling over the weekend what I was taught by a brother in our meeting that the wall represents something that is substantially formed in God's people. It is not simply that we walk round on principles, but there is something built up in the hearts of His people, and, of course, according to this book, recovered too. And that is priestly work, the way we serve one another. Another very important dimension to what you say is that work was undertaken by households. There are women and children in the service, but the women and the children helped with the building as well. In fact, I have noticed that, while the trades are given for a lot of the people, there was not a stonemason among them. So this is not a matter of natural ability - jewellers were building a wall. It shows that this work was of God. What was it for? Why is God building something up in me? How do I account for the fact that what He is building in you is distinct from what He is building in me? How do I account for the exercise that *your* household has, which is not the exercise I have? Where is the thread that runs through all this? The thread, I think, that runs through it is His objective to be praised. I think that is a very

elevating view, not only of my personal exercises; as you rightly imply, they certainly should inform our understanding of what He is pleased to pass us through together.

RBH “I after them” - that is Nehemiah. And he went the way that would symbolise the difficulties. He was the one that was instrumental in all these things being overcome. I was imagining that some might stop and look at the difficulties and he would encourage them to keep going. We do not want to be engaged with the difficulties.

DAB Yes, that is right. We often speak about the way Palestinian shepherds led their sheep - and that is different from the way English shepherds operate - but here Nehemiah follows, does he not? He would gather up anyone who was distracted by the difficulties. He was a man that had divine objectives in his heart. It is a little like what Paul says to Corinth; it is almost as if Nehemiah would say as to the choir: “we, being many, are one loaf”.

RBH Yes, stragglers would not be in the position to take part in the praise of God, if they stayed back.

DAB Yes, that is right, but there were not any stragglers, which is, I think, the encouraging thing.

DMW That really represents the leadership, does it not?

DAB Yes, there are several different ways of looking at leadership. One way of looking at leadership is that a leader knows where he is going. Sometimes leaders think people ought to follow them because they think they know better, but I think what is being suggested is that there was a brother whose leadership led him to follow the choir, because he wanted to ensure that they reached God's end.

DMW The most important formation militarily is the rear guard; and if you do not have adequate leadership there to gather up so that everybody continues in movement, there will be defeat.

DAB Yes, I think I understand that. And does it not say somewhere that the glory of Jehovah would be their rearguard, Isa 58: 8? He took up that key position in relation to the journey of the children of Israel. It says the cloud moved behind the people, Exod 14: 19. Why was that? It certainly was not that they should stop. God says, “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward”, Exod 14: 15. That is at the beginning of the journey, but what was God's end? God's end was His

praise.

WSC The Lord says, "When he has put forth all his own, he goes before them", John 10: 4. That is a little different to this but He puts them forth; first He has to be behind them to do that.

DAB Yes, that is a very encouraging way the truth is presented; we follow because we are attracted. We follow out of love and out of attachment. But there is this other side here that the Lord in grace would not fail to bring us all to God's end.

KAO In John 20 there is this well-known reference to the first day of the week, and the doors were shut where the disciples were through fear of the Jews, but then we have the Lord coming - "Jesus came", John 20: 19. I wonder if that summarises a little bit this testimonial position. It is sometimes not just stragglers, if I can put it that way, who need help. We gather with certain burdens and cares that weigh on us, but what we look for is the Lord to manifest Himself, and make room for that.

DAB Yes, I wanted to put the right word on the course that the second choir took, a word that encompasses the furnace and the sheep-gate. The span of the thought covers the whole side on which, according to Romans, we need the God of endurance and all encouragement. God is able to cover such a span and that is one whole facet of His ways with us. The other side is privilege. There is the fountain, there is an ascent, and there is what David speaks of in his house, and those sorts of things. We should not be unbalanced in our minds because these are like two sides of a coin; you cannot have one without the other.

KAO My exercise in mentioning that scripture is that we need to be real about the circumstances that we actually do face, and not pretend that there are not difficulties and things that weigh on our spirits; but to know something about this God of endurance and encouragement and to prove that when we assemble.

DAB I do not think that anyone who takes responsibility among the brethren should be glib, because brethren who are concerned will begin to feel that their concerns are belittled. The fact that I do not share some of those concerns may not mean that they are not substantial; they may certainly look substantial to others. What I am hoping to do is to show that God has something in mind in everything He passes people through, whether it is personal, whether it is

bereavement, illness and such things; whether it is worry, pressure, set-backs, disappointments, whatever it may be, anxiety about relationships, anxiety about the future among the brethren, all those kinds of things are real exercises. I remember a brother speaking in relation to the way 2 Corinthians begins - he said, that if He is the God of all encouragement, that means you will not find any encouragement anywhere else, because it is *all there*. How gracious of God to bring the totality of a resource like that into a company like Corinth.

JKK Is it helpful to see that all of this was built by persons, so that the ground was built up, the wall was built up and there had to be trust that whoever it was, whether it was the jeweller that built that wall or someone else, that they built it properly. In a company we may find persons that have gone through these exercises in a very personal way, and we can appreciate that through them, through what they have worked out and built up.

DAB Yes. I do not want to set aside the responsible thought you are bringing in, but Paul also says, “ye are God’s husbandry, God’s building”, 1 Cor 3: 9. God’s building turns into a wall if I connect myself to what God is doing, because there is a call to have part in this work which has to be answered to. We must not overlook that side, but the grace and the power and the material and the survivability of the material is accounted for by its divine origin. How wonderful it is that God should give us things that belong to Him to build with. You might ask where that building is: it is in you and me. That is why I can count on the quality of the workmanship in you. I am not counting on things you have imagined: I am counting on things God has done in you.

LPC It says that “they stood still in the prison-gate”. In Psalm 46 it says, “Be still, and know that I am God”, v 10. God will be exalted among the nations. Do you think that we have to minimise all distraction in order that we might stand still, and be focused and fix our eyes on God coming to His house?

DAB Yes, I think there is a lot in what you say. Nehemiah presumably stopped with them in the prison gate. Now we are not going to remain in the prison gate, surely; then it goes on to say “both choirs stood in the house of God”. We might understand that better. But if we apply this teaching to the history of Israel, in a sense Romans 9, 10 and 11 discuss the prison gate, when there is an intermission in Israel’s response. I mean Israel was called to praise: “ye shall be to me a

kingdom of priests, and a holy nation", Exod 19: 6. That was where the service of God was to be. And now the harps are hung on the willows, and praise waits in silence. They have their synagogues but there is no altar. Israel is separated from its God, and their praise is silent. How God feels that! It is good just to remember that God's feelings are engaged in this whole process. It is as if Paul asks in Romans 9, 10 and 11 whether God can be frustrated. Have they stopped in the prison gate? "Far be the thought", Paul says, "how much rather their fulness?"; "what their reception ... ", Rom 11: 11, 12, 15.

DMW So the setting of Nehemiah is recovery, but it is a remnant situation. The hearts of those who are engaged in this would not in any way forget the thought of what Israel was to God or what Jerusalem is to be for God. Would you say as to the prison gate that, if we see the moral and spiritual application at the present time, we would have to stand still about it?

DAB That is where I am coming to; I am not just talking about Israel, although I think God would have Christian believers feel the state of Israel, and its apostasy at the present time. An intelligent Christian believer would feel that. Mr Darby says in his early ministry 'you know I love a Jew (how rarely are they brought) when they love the Lord', Letters vol 1 p1. But there is plenty in the Christian position that would make us feel similarly, would it not?

DMW Yes, it would. It would actually, in one sense, raise our thoughts about ourselves to the thoughts that Christ has for the assembly, and how He feels about this, and that the remnant character and condition of things, and Paul's ministry being in captivity publicly. I think we enter into His feelings which are a bit above our feelings, do you think?

DAB Yes. As a child, I used to hear this word 'remnant' in a meeting and it puzzled me, because my mother looked out for remnants to make clothes from because they were cheaper. And I wondered to myself about brethren talking about the remnant - and if this might be something cheap. And then when I started reading the ministry, brothers put it to Mr James Taylor that the remnant is not the 'fag-end'; and in one place he says, 'as to quality, it is essentially equal to the prime thing', (vol 49 p217); I learned from him that the remnant carries all the moral and spiritual features of the whole: it is the depository of the original. And that is a challenging exercise. But we see that idea in the choirs, do we not? All the moral and spiritual features of the whole,

moulded and blended by an appreciation of the way they had come, enriched the service of praise.

WSC I think what has been said is really important because these persons are all named here. It could have just said, 'and the priests' but it named each one. I think of divine interest in us - we need to accept that, and acknowledge that God has an interest in us, therefore He names all of these people.

DAB Yes, and according to the previous section they had to be gathered, as if they had made themselves hamlets - these priests were not living in Jerusalem, There was a special blessing if you were willing to dwell in Jerusalem (Neh 11: 2), but the priests were not dwelling in Jerusalem. They had allowed things to settle out into a more fragmented sort of idea, like the denominations. You walk around the streets of Wheaton, and you will find these "hamlets" with people seeking to serve God scattered in a diverse way. But they were to be part of the choir, and then it is as if God said, 'Well, there are your ways' - He says His ways are higher than our ways, Isa 55: 9. But His ways have these two main strands - they are what we learn from privilege, and they are what we learn in the pathway of exercise and responsibility. And He is able to plait those two strands into a wonderful unity which releases His praise; that is His objective. I am not saying there is not praise along the way, but that is God's thought.

RBH Would standing still in the prison gate - lead us to see that we can never forget where we came from?

DAB Exactly. They actually started in the dung gate. There are things that have to be carried out and away. Then what you say is right. And the furnace too - you would never forget a furnace, would you? "The furnace of affliction", Isa 48: 10. We might take account of Joseph, for example; he would never forget what he had passed through. But his heart turned to God, did it not? We had an address last Saturday on what he said: "but God", Gen 45: 8. I think that is something we should see in all our exercises. I am not saying that means we should rush through them, or close them down in an untimely way. In a sense, they have to run their course in God's hands. But He allows nothing that does not have this in view. And frankly, if I had an intuition that a course of exercise was leading me away from this, I would be wary of it.

RBH So there is the One, there is the Deliverer that set us free.

DAB Yes, exactly, but He set us free to approach. He said He did not set His people free to scatter. I like this idea, and I am very struck with the way in Romans in which we have the oneness on both sides. "The God of endurance and of encouragement give to you to be like-minded one toward another" - which is something we need practically; but also, "that ye may with one accord, with one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". So there are those two unities. You may say one would lead to the other; that may be true. But it shows that whatever view we take of God's ways with us, they have that convergent force in them.

GMC When you come to Revelation the gates are not named, are they? What is called attention to is the material that produced them - the one pearl. I wonder if that is related to our experience of learning what these gates are, and are worked out, but no names are used.

DAB Yes, and each gate was of one pearl. Do you understand they were twelve pearls?

GMC I have learned recently that a pearl is worthless once it is broken.

DAB Yes, it is, and it would be folly to even cut into one. There is a precious harmony in the holy city - whichever way you approach it you see that. And that should be seen in our gatherings. There are a number of gatherings represented here today, and it will be some time sadly before I see most of the brethren here again, but there should be something in London that corresponds to what I feel I am leaving here, that has that character; and certainly, we feel that in the service of praise that oneness is accomplished. We sang Hymn 292 this morning

O God, supreme in majesty.

We once visited a sister who never gets to the Supper, and she said that when the brethren are meeting for the Supper, she liked to imagine what they are enjoying. And she thought it is encapsulated in that hymn; so she said, 'I sit here and sing it'. That is like the one pearl, is it not?

GMC You are speaking about oneness; so I would tend to think it is just one pearl that is given expression to in each place like you say.

DAB Yes, that is so sweet to think that there is a sister, who is led by the Spirit, to see what another gathering is enjoying in such a light. And

the God of endurance is behind that. But the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is behind it as well.

HJK It specifically says it was twelve pearls - “twelve gates, twelve pearls”, Rev. 21: 21.

DMW The one pearl was inside.

DAB Yes, it is the same material: I appreciate that adjustment. What a view you would have of the city. You would hardly be able to tell which side you were approaching it from because it would look the same as the others.

DMW Paul's ministry forms what is inside. The twelve apostles of the Lamb would speak of what is external.

DAB Yes, that is true, and we remember that the Lord speaks of seeking goodly pearls, and He found *one*, *Matt 13: 45*. I wonder if that merchant would ever have been satisfied with two or three. Did he rather have this feeling that his heart would not be satisfied unless he could find one? Was there some sublime expression of his heart's desire that could be found? And we know the pearl represents what the assembly is in divine counsel. We need to understand that God's counsel is not something that is parked while His ways are driven by the vagaries of the territory and environment that might be encountered among the people. God's counsels enter into His ways. He cannot be hindered in those ways; so it is as well that we know what they are. My impression is that His ways lead up to oneness in His praise.

JAO Why do you think it says that “the singers sang loud”? There is to be some evidence really of being thoroughly in things, in the testimony that is rendered, the “great sacrifices”, the “great joy”, and the “joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off”. This is not the same experience that is accounted in Ezra 3: 13, where it was mingled with weeping. This was pure, unmingled joy.

DAB That is very fine, is it not? - “joy unmingled”, Hymn 88. There is such a mixture in God's ways that the product must be a blend. There is another occasion when there was joy and weeping at the same time, but God is looking for joy unmingled. I am thinking too of what the Lord says about the stones, “the stones will cry out” (Luke 19: 40), and that made me consider what was asked about: this is in the saints, is it not? And there is something quickened and living that we have been speaking about that expresses itself at volume; this is not a whisper or a

gasp. This is the energy of recovered lives.

GMC The Lord cried out with a loud voice on the cross (Matt 27: 46), and I am wondering if this is related to that victory, that we come into.

DAB Yes, that is a very precious thought, that He did not die in weakness. What a mighty shout that is, that He died in divine power, and we celebrate that, and the celebration of it should be living.

JAO He also cried out in John 7.

DAB Yes, how pleasing it is to God if there is this full-heartedness. Our hymn says,

Our satisfied hearts to outpour in His praise. (Hymn 257)

It is not just unity for its own sake, but for the volume and harmony that all the people together would be able to generate. It is very interesting that the women and children have their part in it. I make another appeal to the children - and I really do not want to appear patronising as I value God's work in them - but this is for them too. They might say they have not had all these experiences, but they have a place in the house. You will have the experiences if the Lord waits.

HJK You suggest that the gates here are all different, but when you come to the holy city every gate is exactly the same. That is why it says that each one was of one pearl, and so that is what God is going to bring in. We had that a little in the service of God this morning, "that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15: 28); so when it comes to that it says, "I saw no temple in it ... and the lamp thereof the Lamb", Rev 21: 22-23. I think it all leads on, in the sense that we have been talking about, to the eternal state when there will be no difference - all will be one in Christ.

DAB A pearl is an interesting thing, because it reflects a lot of different colours; it reflects a spectrum, and the integrity of the pearl is its oneness. In a sense the diversity and variety is internalised, and while we are on the journey we are learning inwardly. And while we are learning, God presents things to us one at a time, and for that reason the gates speak of different things; they are different lessons. I do not think it is amiss that the first gate in the rebuilding was the sheep-gate. We remarked that it was the only gate that is not said to have locks. It had to be closed, but no locks are mentioned, and it was built by a priest and a priest's family. The priest in question failed later on. But the sheep-gate was not to let sheep out; the sheep-gate was for sheep

coming in. It is interesting that that is where the rebuilding started, and that is why I thought that our testimonial history includes the gospel. This choir came to that gate, so that God's ways in the gospel are brought into this story. God's ways in the gospel have in view His praise. I have been very interested to read Mr James Taylor - he speaks of the Lord and the woman in Luke 7, and he says: 'the house did not belong to Christ. Do you think He would have sent her away? No, I am sure the Lord felt it that He did not have a house of His own'. But then he adds, 'He will never send you away. He will not say "Go". Why? He has a house now', vol 1 p35-36. And that is where His praise proceeds.

KAO Regarding the scripture in Romans 15, is it helpful for us to note the setting of the verses you have read? I am particularly thinking about bearing infirmities, but also not pleasing ourselves. We have that very fine expression, "For the Christ also did not please himself", v 3. Does that not underlie the whole working out of praise and what is due to God?

DAB I think what you are drawing attention to is a necessary stage in the process. We often speak about the epistle to the Romans as charting the journey for us all. There are a lot of things along that journey that I have to learn. I would not say it is entirely prescriptive because God's ways with every one are specific. At first, there is teaching that is personal, but then you come to a point in chapter 12 where you are converging with other people who have had similar paths of exercise. Of course, this is not simply so you can just share stories with them, but so that you can carry them and help them; and you will find probably that someone is trying to carry you. So that convergence is a second stage. We come together from something that appears to be quite internal, and maybe private almost, and then we start sharing things; and as we do, of course, the big question that comes up is like-mindedness. And Paul says, 'There is a God for that'. But there is something further than like-mindedness; there is "one accord and one mouth". Those who have come this way glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I think it is practical; that is how it works. We have the same idea in one verse in 1 Corinthians: "we, being many, are one loaf", chap 10: 17.

HJK You mentioned that the sheep-gate is not said to have any locks and bars, and it says that they built the sheep-gate, and they also had to

build the fish-gate; but all the rest were just repaired. I just wondered if you had a further thought on that. I think it is interesting that there is one gate that did not have locks and bars, and it and another gate had been completely destroyed.

DAB Yes; that is rather sad when you think about the history - it shows where Satan is working - he is out to destroy completely what might speak about the gospel, and what speaks about fellowship, is he not? In a sense, ecclesiastical form does not bother him too much; it is where there is an engagement with souls that he gets busy. But Satan could not stop these gates being rebuilt; he could not stop the recovery. It is fine to see that they do not start the repairs with the easy gates; they start with the one that matters the most, which was the sheep-gate; they were concerned about souls coming in. Now as we move on through the book those souls who had worked on the wall get into the choirs, and they become the house. We can see why it was important to begin there, and why it was priestly, and why Satan was against it.

DHMcF Maybe you can help me as to Romans 15: 7, "Wherefore receive ye one another, according as the Christ also has received you to the glory of God". Why would he say, "receive ye one another"?

DAB Well, fellowship is a privilege. And it is not simply a privilege to ask for fellowship; it is a privilege to extend fellowship as well. It is a privilege to be able to establish a relationship with someone who belongs to Christ and in whom God has worked; my building of the wall can now join to someone else's. And "receive ye one another... to the glory of God" is a very elevated way of looking at fellowship. I think you have that view if you understand God's objective: if you have in mind the holiness and preciousness of His praise, then the opportunity to share that with someone who has come the path of exercise and responsibility would be one you would grasp.

KAK Is that seen in Ananias? He is thinking about what the Lord is saying to him about His sheep.

DAB Yes, that is a good example: "And he was with the disciples", Acts 9: 19. Paul saw the "me" of verse 4. And in a sense, he joined the choir. What it must have been like for Paul to be at the morning meeting the first week he was in Damascus! How uplifting it must have been. I heard of a visitor at the morning meeting a few months ago who said, 'I have been to a lot of places but this is the first place I have come where the company seem to know that the Lord was present'. What an

uplifting thing that is. It does not confer anything on the particular company; they did not realise they were giving that impression to people, but that is what we have here. There was a oneness. I am told that Mr James Taylor used to say to bring people to the Supper; they will see saints at their best. And that is what we have here. Being like-minded is a constant practical exercise, but the Supper is an occasion in which we can enjoy the benefits of that exercise, and God can as well in His praise.

DMW It just occurred to me when you spoke of like-mindedness, which is oneness, in fact, that essentially in the ways of God in Romans, each one of us has to be adjusted to be subject-minded, so that we can be like-minded.

DAB Good. I think you would agree that the only prospect of like-mindedness is to be like Christ. Naturally, we are not just made like that, are we? "But we have the mind of Christ", 1 Cor. 2: 16. And it is as we sacrifice the defence of our own minds and our own opinions, in subjection not only to God but to one another.

DMW So we spoke about "joined in soul, thinking one thing", in Philippians 2: 2, but immediately to sustain that we have, "let this mind be in you" (v 5); so that the principle of reduction on my side is important, and obedience, in view of expansion in the next chapter; is that right? The goal is set before us.

DAB Yes, and we have the same thought in Ephesians 5. Singing is a happy thing to do, and sometimes singing may mask that what is going on in my mind. Perhaps it is a bit selfish - I may want my voice to be heard above everybody else's; and that tendency enters into exercise too. But then Paul says, "submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ", Eph. 5: 21. That is what produces the harmony that glorifies God. I do not understand the concept of fellowship without submission to one another. I am not saying submission to Mr So-and-So; I am saying there should be a spirit of subjection to what the Lord has in the body of the brethren.

GMC We had noticed recently in reading in Numbers 23 and 24, when the enemy came in to attack and curse God's people, that Balaam goes up on the mountain and he sees order, and he sees perfection and beauty. If he had come down he would have seen what was going on, things that had to be dealt with, but I wonder if keeping that objectively in our hearts - how God views things - helps us to move forward in a

right way.

DAB I think so, and it often used to be said, God did not let Balaam look in the tents.

Endurance mentioned here is part of a process in Romans 5. Paul says, “we have also access by faith into this favour in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God”, v 2. That is the experience of the first choir, and it all sounds very nice, but then it is not only that, but “we also boast in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works endurance; and endurance, experience; and experience, hope”, v 3-4. That is like the second choir, I think. Endurance does not mean indefinite bearing of something; endurance is bearing something with a prospect in mind as Paul says, “experience, hope; and hope does not make ashamed” (v 5); that means your hopes will not be disappointed. But sometimes exercise wears us down, and we think just to come out on the other side would be enough. There is to be a stepping forward to the unity in God's praise. There is something particularly cleansing to the spirit: it washes all the bitterness and sorrow and cloudiness out of my spirit. If at the end there is something I had to endure, I can find others with whom I can praise.

KAO The verse before where you read confirms what has been said: “that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope”, Rom 15: 4. There are both sides there, and it works towards this unity and oneness.

DAB Yes; I think it is helpful to remember what Paul says here about the value of the Scriptures. We remember what he says in Corinth, that the Scriptures are there for our admonition. But here he says they are for our encouragement.

I have thought quite a bit about meekness. It is not the same as lowliness because the Lord was both. And it is not necessarily the same as humility. I think meekness is only formed in God's hands. Moses, for example, was an impulsive, impetuous person; *forty years* in God's school made him the meekest man in all the earth. There is something particularly divine in the soul of a believer who is meek. It is not a natural trait; it is not a human characteristic. In my quest for some light on it, I read something of Mr Stoney which drew my attention to Psalm 25. It says two things about the meek. One is that it is “The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way”, v 9.

And that links with what was said just now that a meek person has opened his mind to divine guidance, and the spirit of that is priestliness; it is spirituality. I find I am so ineffective when it comes to restoration because I rely on my own sincerity, and my own goodwill and good intentions. But the resource for restoration is divine. And it is formed in the spirit of the believer, maybe over many, many years. A “meek and quiet spirit”, Peter says, “is of great price”, 1 Pet 3: 4. That is because it is rare. We ought to pray that it should be found among us. It is not just weakness, and it is not sentimentality or anything of that sort. It is a feature that was seen in Jesus, a very strong feature.

DMW It says, Christ Jesus “emptied himself”, Phil 2: 7. The food of life is in another kind of Person altogether. It is the work of God.

DAB Yes, it is, and we might sometimes imagine the work of God as if it is refining what is natural, but meekness is not a natural part of human nature. It comes entirely from God and where it is found it is besides what that person's nature was.

If we really have the divine objective in our hearts it would make us dependent on divine grace and divine wisdom to bring it about. I hope we are left with an understanding that solving problems is not the divine objective; *praise* is the divine objective. Psalm 139 says, “I will praise thee, for I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (v 14); and I have been told that Mr James Taylor commented on that verse that ‘man was made to praise’. So even in the creation, what we are speaking of now that was recovered, was God's objective.

KAO I was just going to confirm what you were saying about meekness. Paul would be ready for the Corinthians; he says, “I myself, Paul, entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of the Christ” (2 Cor 10: 1); it is not his.

DAB Yes, he was employing it, but it was something he was invoking, and he could really only point to another Man in whom it is.

KAO And would you agree that to whatever extent that was seen in Paul, it was largely brought out through suffering?

DAB Yes, it was. I am just impressed by that; we will go from here back into the path of exercise, and the travails of my own soul journey; of the reproach under which I may find myself, the exercise to be right-minded and work things out in fellowship, prayer and all those things. Let us not forget, beloved, that God's objective in it all is His praise.

KRO It speaks of “the meek”. I was thinking that it defines; it can be a definition of a person as being perceived by God, can it not?

DAB Yes, “*they* shall inherit the earth”, Matt. 5: 5. The people who seek nothing get the most.

GMC Would the idea of meekness be brought in with the idea of the pearl - it is not a hard diamond, but is relatively soft, is it not?

DAB Yes, very good. And all these precious things of course are built up by a process, and that includes our privileges. This weekend has been part of the process. Maybe we have been able to put some of our burdens to one side this weekend, and I am glad if we have, but that does not mean to say we have left all our exercises because the privilege is part of those exercises.

JAO Meekness really has to do with our relations together, does it not? Is it man towards man, not so much towards God but towards one another? It is the spirit of a thing. It speaks in 2 Timothy 2: 25 as well about a spirit of meekness. That is the attitude in which we go.

DAB And it is not weakness, because it can set right those who oppose. You are up against force from the other side. So there is something very effective there, is there not?

DHMcL You referred to the ornament of the meek and quiet spirit, but it is incorruptible; that means it goes through. It does not fail with responsible history. It is part of what we will be to the eternal day.

DAB Yes, I think we would all have to be honest and say that the difficulties we try and meet are apt to taint us. I am always sorry if someone gets bitter, but even if they do not get bitter they get sad. And maybe sometimes eventually the brethren will come through but for a while some of us are a bit grumpy afterwards; we need something incorruptible I think. I have a feeling that the Lord would renew us out of our exercises with a fresh unity that finds its heart in His service.

DMW Would you say that there are certain features that follow the spirit of meekness, and are found in Christ and in service: the bondman's form, humility, and obedience, even unto death? That is necessary, it was for Him, of course.

DAB Yes, that is worth contemplating, and if we go back to Matthew 11: 29 where He speaks of rest - that is a very precious thing, is it not? Where will you find rest? In the company of a meek and lowly Jesus -

that is where you will find it. How many of our spirits need stilling in relation to testimonial burdens. You need something divine. Just being in a company of people who agree with you will not give you rest; it is the meek and lowly Man who will give you rest.

WSC It is interesting that the Lord gave us the Supper. In a physical sense it unites us, and it should in this sense, but it is not something grandiose as the world might have; it is a very simple expression.

DAB Well, our enquiry relates to the loaf, but certainly, in our culture we do not share a cup, do we? There is something unique in our associations with one another and in the cup at the Supper that we share it together. It is very intimate and it is very wonderful. If you take the men to whom the Supper was delivered, they were diverse. Some of them were natural brothers but that does not necessarily produce unity. It is rather sad in John 21 that maybe seven of them were interested in fishing, and perhaps four were not. So naturally speaking they had their own interests. The Lord proposed something that could be expanded rapidly as it is now, from the eleven, if you read the beginning of the Acts “multiplied”, it says, Acts 6: 7. How much diversity is that bringing in? You imagine the meeting in Ephesus or Corinth. We know each other well; many of us are intermarried and we know each other well. In Corinth, most people there would have been unknown to each other. But Paul says, “we, being many”; the Lord has been able to put in the midst of such an environment one loaf.

WSC That is what I was thinking. It really is central to Christianity; it is central to our fellowship, but it is the Lord. He is the Centre of it.

DAB The Supper is at the heart of fellowship, and that is how we decide every question of fellowship, in relation to the Supper. But this is it set at its true level.

DMW You mentioned the cup. There is something beyond oneness which the loaf would suggest, and fellowship, fellowship of His death. There is something beyond, which we would desire to reach for the satisfaction of His own heart.

DAB You had better just say what the something is. Are you thinking of communion?

DMW That, and union. Oneness underlies union.

DAB The cup is linked to the new covenant. There are three steps in

God's ways; He does a work - in this case, the cross; He makes a promise - not that He *may* do something but that He will; and then He seals that with a covenant. That is a very precious thing. God is committed to the whole thing, and the work is done. And that is what we celebrate at the Supper.

DMW So the cup would suggest divine disposition in what He has done Himself, as a return to Himself.

DAB If we talk of dispositions, naturally humanly speaking we shift our dispositions; we change our angle on things. God's disposition is fixed because the work is done - is that right? It is fixed in our favour; it is fixed for His glory.

Wheaton

29th November 2015

List of Initials:-

D A Burr, London; G M Chellberg, Wheaton; W S Chellberg, Wheaton; L P Chin, Wheaton; R B Hill, Toronto; J F Kaczmerack, Villa Grove; H J Klassen, Aberdeen ID;
J K Knauss, Indianapolis; K A Knauss, Indianapolis; D H MacFarlane, New York;
D H McLaren, Dundee; J A Oberg, Villa Grove; K A Oberg, Villa Grove; K R Oliver, Denton; D M Welch, Denton

PRAISE FROM WEAKNESS

John A Brown

Romans 8: 26-29, 35-39

Hebrews 12: 1-3, 6, 7, 11

John 15: 1-4

We spoke in the reading about the pathway of the believer, about having the Lord Jesus before us as our High Priest. He is always that; He never stops being that. Now I desire, dear brethren, to speak about the Lord Jesus as the One who has been in this pathway before us. It is a wonderful thing that we can have the Lord Jesus before us in so many different ways. He is a Man in heaven, a *real* Man in heaven, and soon we are going to be there with Him. He is our great High Priest, but He is also the blessed lowly One who trod His pathway here and laid down His life. He endured the contradiction, "so great contradiction of sinners against himself". So He is the Model for us, and He is able to sustain us as we are occupied with Him where He is now, but also to remember how He was here.

Every single detail of the believer's pathway is to yield fresh glory to God, no matter what it is; no matter if it is apparently negative or positive. That is very difficult for the natural mind to accept, and I want to speak sensitively because there are those here who have suffered in ways that I have not suffered: the loss of loved ones or other loss, whatever it might be; and especially assembly sorrows. I feel my lack of capacity to speak about these things; there are those here who have suffered much. But my impression is that every single detail of each one of our pathways is intended by God to yield more by way of fruit to Him. What I had in mind in John 15 is that even the branches that are bearing fruit are purged; they are pruned so that there might be more fruit. That again is something that is difficult to understand in some circumstances, and yet it is all under the hand of the Father. What a wonderfully comforting matter!

It is also comforting to know that "the Spirit joins also its help to our weakness". How weak we often feel, whether it be in health or in difficult circumstances or in loss - whatever it might be, how weak we feel! What grace, what wonderful divine grace it is, that God has come into our circumstances in the presence within us of the Holy Spirit, and He joins His help to our weakness. "We do not know what we should pray for as is fitting": I suppose that most of us here will have had that

experience. What should we ask for in relation to suffering? What should we ask God to do? We do not know what to pray for as is fitting. Mr Coates, in relation to this passage, said something which affected me. He asked the brethren to suppose that a parent had a delicate child which had fallen ill. The parent could kneel down and present it all before God in deep exercise, but the Spirit would know what is good for the child, vol 25 (Outline of Corinthians) p281. It says here, "the Spirit itself makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered". How comforting that is. The Holy Spirit, in His greatness as a divine Person, joins His help to our weakness, and He "makes intercessions with groanings which cannot be uttered".

There are brethren here who are going through great trials at the moment, and some have had experience of that in the past. We do not know what might be in the future for any one of us, but what a wonderful comfort it is to know that not only do we have our Lord Jesus who can sympathise, because He has been a Man here and has known the sufferings and the contradictions of sinners against Himself. Not only do we have a heavenly Father who cares about us and on whom we can cast our cares (1 Pet 5: 7) - how blessed that is, but we have a divine Person who can join His help to our weakness. That is a remarkable statement; it is not just that the Spirit sympathises with us: He joins Himself to our weakness, and He makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered. I feel the need to be more sensitive to what might be allowed by God, because I sometimes tend to be rather stoical, but that is not the way the Christian should be. If we feel these things as allowed of God, we will be able to go through them with God so that there might be more fruit for Him. And so it says, "he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit", because that blessed One, the Holy Spirit, "intercedes for saints according to God". So we have two Intercessors. We have the Lord Jesus "always living to intercede for" us (Heb 7: 25), and we have the Holy Spirit interceding for saints according to God. There is a blessed divine standard of help and support.

Then verse 28 was what I had in my mind most of all; "we *do* know that all things work together for good to those who love God". That requires faith. I accept that there are experiences which brethren here are going through that I have never had to face, but I can say, and I trust every one of us can be encouraged to say, that "we *do* know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to purpose". We can link the everyday experiences,

the tests, the sorrows - some of them excruciating - with the working out of the purpose of God. It is not that He causes all of these things to happen, but He allows them in His ways so that His purpose might be brought to pass. And as we have often been reminded, God's ways always serve His purpose. It is a wonderful thing to have the faith to hold onto that: it is always so.

And then, "Because whom he has foreknown, he has also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son". That is what these experiences are for, that we might be formed to be more like Jesus. If everything is going well and there are no tests, I know how testing it is to be kept in exercise. But whatever the circumstances, what God is doing is conforming us to the image of His Son. That is a wonderful thing, but as soon as it begins to happen, the enemy will try to stop it because he hates seeing people on this earth who are conformed to the image of the Son of God. He will do all he can to stop it. He will do all he can to divert you, or to cause you to fail under the pressure of whatever it might be that God has allowed. The enemy is against it, but there is a power within us that is greater than the power of the enemy. What a wonderful resource we have in Christ and the Spirit, and it is all in relation to the purpose of God. But there is something being worked out in view of being "conformed to the image of his Son, so that he", that is Jesus, "should be the firstborn among many brethren".

What a wonderful comfort that is, to know that there are persons who can be called the brethren of Christ on the side of privilege, and every one of that number has been formed through suffering. As looking around this gathering today, I see persons who know far more about what I am speaking about than I do, but I do know that it is true. I have proved it a little, and it is a wonderful thing to prove through experience that divine Persons, Christ and the Spirit, are for us in circumstances of trial and sorrow that there might be more fruit for God, and "that we might be conformed to the image of his Son". Every detail is to yield that. Moral features of Christ are being developed in believers - the features described in Galatians 5 as the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience with each other, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control. These wonderful features are to be seen in believers as a result of their experience with God, for we are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son".

Hebrews 12 speaks of chastening, which is really what these

exercises are. But first of all, the Lord Jesus is brought before us at the beginning of the chapter; “laying aside every weight, and sin which so easily entangles us”. Well, I know about that. The weight may not be a sin; it may be putting too much time into a busy job, it may be other things that would deflect us from communion with the Lord Jesus and with the Holy Spirit. Whatever they are, we are to lay them aside, and what a blessed thing it is to do that as answering to the appeal of divine love. I find the power of distraction strong sometimes, but there is a greater power. These distractions would draw us aside but there are “bands of a man” and “cords of love”, Hos 11: 4. It comes back to what we said this morning about the attractiveness of Jesus. I trust that everyone here does find Jesus attractive. There is no one like Him, in all His beauty and glory, His graciousness, His patience. How great is the love of that Man for each one of us. I trust we can all speak of the attractiveness of the Lord Jesus. I trust that everyone here knows Him in that way as a blessed living Man, but He is One who has been here.

Then, “looking stedfastly on Jesus the leader and completer of faith: who ... endured the cross, having despised the shame”. What it was for the Lord of life and glory to lay down His life for me as a sinner, but also to lay down His life so that all the thoughts of God should be secured. Because, for the purpose of God to be brought out and secured, it required Jesus to go into death. It required Him to go into death for sinners like me, but it required Him to go into death so that the purpose of God could be brought out in all its glory in the death and in the rising again of Jesus. Oh, how much He has secured in that way, but how much He endured. He endured the cross, having despised the shame; so we are to “consider well him who endured so great contradiction from sinners against himself”. We are no longer, as it were, considering Him as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; we are considering Him now as One who was here and who endured these sufferings and the contradiction of those who were against Him. It is not now the High Priest: it is the lowly One. He was lowly when He was here, and He is still the same. That blessed One is still the same in all these blessed features that so endear Him to the hearts of those who love Him. And I trust that this verse “consider well him who endured so great contradiction from sinners against himself” will be of comfort to those who are going through so much at the moment - some of them in this room - “that ye be not weary, fainting in your minds”.

Well, we need to hold on to Jesus, the One who is available to you as a blessed, lowly Man, a High Priest in heaven interceding for us -

but One who has been through these sufferings. The chapter goes on to speak of chastening. God, as the Father of spirits, is chastening, but it is *always* in love. Divine chastening is *never* punitive. Never; it is always in love. It always has a positive outcome in view, that there should be fruit; “no chastening at the time seems to be matter of joy, but of grief; but afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness ...”. To whom is that fruit yielded, that peaceful fruit of righteousness? To God, to the Lord Jesus. And what is it? How much it would embrace; but I think that praise would be included in the peaceful fruit of righteousness. It embraces the response that God is looking for and sometimes He allows, in His wisdom, this chastening which is to bring forth the peaceful fruit.

The Lord Jesus Himself speaks of fruit. We have been reading today a lot from Hebrews and we have been thinking of the words of the Lord Jesus. In John 15, He is speaking about Himself - “I am the true vine” - but He is also speaking about His Father. We have spoken about how the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit help us in the exercises of the pathway, that there might be more for God, and now here the Father is doing something. He is the Husbandman and “as to every branch bearing fruit, he purges it” - that means He prunes it - “that it may bring forth more fruit”. I know virtually nothing about fruit trees, but I do know that careful pruning is needed to maximise the fruitfulness. And that is really what we have been speaking about in the two previous scriptures. Then the Lord Jesus says, “Abide in me and I in you”; that is the key to fruit bearing. You might ask me what bearing fruit is. Well, it could be a number of things: it could be worship; it could be service of different kinds; it could be good work. It could be whatever would please God, but we cannot do any of it, it cannot be successful, we cannot produce anything for the Father's pleasure, unless we abide in the Lord Jesus. It flows from abiding in Jesus. I would seek the Spirit's help to convey a sense of what abiding in Jesus means.

We were in the south west recently, and I saw in the doorway of an ancient church a little leaflet that explained to visitors what that church was about. It said that people came together there for Christian worship, and the leaflet said, 'Christian worship is communion with a living Lord'. Whoever wrote that was a believer in the Lord Jesus. Christian worship is based on communion; that involves the enjoyment of His presence. “Abide *in* me”, not just 'with Me', but *in* Me. It is knowing the restfulness, the joy of your sins being gone, washed away in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. It is knowing the enjoyment of

nearness to Him, the experience of getting down on your knees, on your own, and opening your heart to your Saviour, not asking Him for anything, just speaking with Him, and the Spirit bringing thoughts into your heart, because communion is two-way communication. Everyone here would surely be able to say something about their experience of abiding in Christ. "Abide in me", He says, "and I in you". What a wonderful thing that is - the comfort, the restfulness of it, the joy of it. What a blessed thing communion is. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine, thus neither can ye unless ye abide in me".

As we gather for the Lord's supper tomorrow, God willing, we will open our hearts to Him in collective praise and worship, but no one can be a worshipper unless they know something of communion with the Lord Jesus and with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, because that is where it begins. And the fruit for God can be something essentially simple. I was very struck by something that Mr Coates said about this chapter: 'One might give vast sums of money to do good, and there might be no fruit for God because it did not spring from abiding in Christ', vol 9 (Outline of Mark and Other Ministry) p258. So every thought, every feeling, every action of the believer seeking to be pleasing to God would spring from abiding in Christ. I found that very testing, that every thought of mine, every feeling, what I seek to do for Him, should spring from nearness to my Lord and Saviour, the Leader and Completer of faith, the High Priest who is ever living to intercede for me. What a wonderful Lord and Saviour we have.

May we, each one of us, desire to experience more of abiding in Him and He with us, so that there is more fruit for God, for His Name's sake.

Grimsby

8 June 2019

PERSONS WHO ARE BLESSED

H Tim Franklin

Luke 7: 23

John 20: 29 (from “blessed”)

Revelation 14: 13 (from “Blessed ... henceforth”); 22: 14

I simply wanted to link on with what we had set on for us in the glad tidings here last Lord's day. I felt the edge of this word in Luke 7; how wide it is, and how blessed we are as included in it. But in Luke the “whosoever” comes in, as our brother was speaking of; it brings in all that are in mind for blessing, and embraces all who believe, who “shall not be offended”.

In these references in Luke and John the Lord Himself is speaking; how He adjusted Thomas, who was adjustable. He had missed the meeting, and what that means for us! We have missed many this year, through no fault of our own exactly, but the Lord knows, and these are His words, “blessed they who have not seen and have believed”; which gives John's view of the matter. I think it would be more limited than the “whosoever” of Luke 7. We are amongst them, beloved! We have not seen the Lord, but we are amongst that company, redeemed ones that wait for His coming, wait for when we do see Him, when “we shall be like him”, 1 John 3: 2. We shall soon see Him, and “blessed they who have not seen”: the personnel of the assembly for Christ. John does not bring out the assembly so much, he brings out the family as we have been instructed: “blessed they who have not seen and have believed”. We have had the family emphasised in our present gatherings, the imperative of the family and the household, and the blessing as believing in Him.

We are still with John, and we go into Revelation, and the prophetic unfoldings that there are. I was struck with this verse, “blessed the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth”. We know how blessed it is, not personally, but through the death of loved ones recently, and in our experience, those who die in the Lord; how special they are, how blessed they are! This is a future time of intense suffering, this chapter brings that out; and there will be such a time, and this is what Mr Darby brings out: his impression was that 'the time is come when dying in the Lord was to cease', Synopsis vol 5 p408. The assembly period will have been finished before then, and yet there are martyrs, and they are gathered up. That is how inclusive the work of

God is, how inclusive this blessing is; even dispensationally we cannot limit God. We need to be intelligent as to His ways, but we cannot limit Him, "Blessed the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours". We know that believers who have died in the Lord do rest from their labours, and "their works follow with them", many we have known. You become a little older, and you realise how many we know! They rest from their labours, how blessed, they will not miss out! They are not missing out: "their works follow with them". They have believed in the work of Another for them, what a work was done for them.

We look at the first page of the Bible and how many threads, how many themes, how many of the blessed ways of God with one theme in mind open up! We come to the last page of the Bible and these threads have been drawn together. I speak very simply and I wondered if these things that we read of in Luke, and what we read of in John, and what we read of as to a dispensation to come, are drawn together. The wording is different from the King James' Version; but Mr Darby and others have: "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life" (Rev 22: 14); that includes the present moment, and it includes us! It is being in the gain of what has been done for us, and there is the blessing; how blessed! It is our credential for walking in fellowship. It might become a little hackneyed expression that we do not hear so much of, but these things still apply. We may have been limited in our gatherings, and we can only admit we are, but it is still a fact; it is still required of me. It is still required of each of us as the fellowship is maintained, as the moral side of it is maintained: "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life"; that is Christ! Wonderful source of fruit! John's gospel would help us again about that; and "that they should go in by the gates into the city". It is the last page of the Bible, and we know what the gates are, they are spoken of, there has been much teaching about it, but this is the way in for each of us personally. Then, according to the principles of the truth, according to the principles of the assembly as they are maintained, we "should go in by the gates into the city"; that is our present application of it. This book helps in that figure in the previous chapter; you see the celestial city, setting out all it represents, and it has been explained to us in recent times in ministry.

I wished simply to draw these things together, and I would seek to do so for our encouragement. We are thankful for what our brother

had to say in the preaching, and for what followed from his impression in the preaching, but we are blessed! How blessed we are! We are blessed to be able to gather, beloved; some cannot do it. We are blessed as we are able to have contact, able to read the word together. May we be encouraged for the Lord's Name's sake.

Word in Ministry Meeting, Grimsby

17th September 2020

THE LORD RESTORING

Rob W McClean

Psalm 69: 4 (from “then”)

This Psalm is one of the suffering Psalms as we have been taught. It brings out holy feelings. We have been taught that in this one the Lord is entering into the feelings of Israel. When the Lord was here He felt things as the godly in Israel would have felt things. The verse says, “They that hate me without a cause”, and later we see other aspects brought out in the Psalm that relate to what happened on the cross. I thought of this expression, “then I restored that which I took not away”. I think the thought in the taking away is quite a violent thought, robbery; and the restoration, wonderful grace. I wondered what we might understand by these things.

What was it that was taken away? There would be a number of things that we could think of. We have spoken of those early pages in Genesis, and I was thinking what was take away then, man's innocence. That, in itself, is not to be restored, but what was taken away was God's ability to have that relationship with man, walking in the garden in the cool of the day and conversing with man, and man hid himself; there was that which had been taken away; and the Lord came to restore that. It was not so much in His life here, but in His death and His sufferings. We read of it in that wonderful section in Philippians 2, “and that the death of the cross” v 8. There are many aspects about the work on the cross. There is the work of salvation which we treasure and speak of often, the special theme of the glad tidings. Then there are these other aspects. Our brother has spoken of those that are blessed, and the four aspects of it which are most blessed and most gracious. It would bring in exercise as to whether we might be offended, whether we might be washing our robes. I felt the edge of that as our brother brought it before us. But here we have the Lord restoring “that which I took not away”: the restoring character of the work of the Lord. Sin had come in to sully God's creation, and had brought in distance (and we might suffer because of sin and because of sins), but it says of the Lord that He suffered for sins that were not His own. That would have been involved in the work which was accomplished in the restoration. It was not God that took away His relationship with man; it was what the enemy and fallen man had done.

Another thing we could think of was what the earth had become

in Noah's day. I think it a contrast has been made: Enoch was a witness, but Noah was a preacher. Noah suffered through the judgment that consumed those that had offended God. So Noah waits until God indicates that he should come out of the ark, for God had "shut him in", Gen 7: 16. Then he makes that sacrifice of a sweet odour to God, chap 8: 21. I wondered if that had the character of restoration, restoring something that he had not taken away.

But the Lord is ever distinct. We could consider the way that Israel had been taken up on the line of promise, how they had failed on the line of responsibility and the law, forfeited the blessings on that account. God did not take the blessings away: they were forfeited. But He goes back to His promises, and Israel is restored on that basis. We are brought into blessing as sinners. We have been touching a little on that in Romans, the severe way that the apostle Paul opens up the case against the sinners, against the Gentiles and us all, but we are taken up. God did not cause the Gentiles to be as they were; they gave God up, and then "God gave them up to a reprobate mind", and various things it speaks of, Rom 1: 28. But the Lord has restored that; those that are not offended in Him, those that put their trust in Him, those that, as we have been reminded, "have not seen and have believed", John 20: 29. What a restoration has come in with the work of the Lord! We often consider His healing work, which we have touched on recently in Luke, and which culminates with the verse our brother has read, as to the way the Lord speaks of these things in that wonderful tender message, "Go, bring back word to John of what ye have seen and heard: that blind see, lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, dead are raised, poor are evangelized; and blessed is whosoever shall not be offended in me", chap 7: 22-23. This was a great restoring work, restoring that which He had not taken away; the healing of man. But the work goes on; it is not now exactly a physical thing, although we would be wrong to discount true healing: the Lord is always able. I do not speak of what some people speak of as faith healing, but I mean what is true and genuine. There is a moral work going on, a moral restoration of that which the Lord took not away. I just feel for myself that I need to get some extra impression about that. What has been restored as the hymn writer says:

For Thou hast brought again to Him
More than by man He lost

(Hymn 431).

The restoration is a greater matter than the loss of what has been taken

away. Part of that is because of *who* has done it, our blessed Lord Jesus. He is the One who has restored, restored for God so that there is that wonderful company that will be here when the Lord comes. The dead in Christ shall rise first, and we the living who remain will all be caught up together. We are in no way to anticipate those that have fallen asleep! What a restoring work that will be! Restoring beyond the fallen condition, and beyond the original condition, to conditions of glory! Sometimes people talk about pieces of equipment and old cars and things, that they have been restored to better-than-new condition. Well, in Christianity we are restored to a new condition that is far above and beyond and better than anything that has ever been before! It is because we are in Christ, it is because He has done it; “then I restored that which I took not away”.

What blessed grace that has operated and will operate to bring us to the most favoured position: a place at the tree of life. There is exercise involved in that, as to the washing of the robes, but surely we would be attracted to this One. What a place we have. Not anything that we could do ourselves but what this great Restorer has done!

May we be encouraged for His Name's sake.

Word in meeting ministry in Grimsby

17th September 2020