

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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VESSELS FOR GOD'S HOUSE

D Andrew Burr

Ezra 5: 12-15; 8: 24-34

Mark 12: 41-44; 14: 1-9

We have been speaking in our readings together about the house of God, as a spiritual structure, made up of the redeemed; those who are in Christ. I wanted to add a word from these passages, which we have read recently at home and in our local meeting, about the vessels of the house of God. We remarked in the reading that certain utensils and other items were made for the tabernacle system, and a larger number evidently were made for the temple, constructed by Solomon. I think there was, in effect, a treasury attached to the temple, in which other vessels were kept that represented the wealth of the temple, and the wealth of God's house can be viewed in that way. On the one hand, its value can be considered as relating to the things that God Himself has brought into the house, to make it a source of supply and life and strength; but on the other hand the wealth of the house, as far as He is concerned at any rate, is to be measured in the vessels of the house.

It is right for us to think of ourselves as vessels because the apostles speak of us in that way. In 2 Timothy 2, Paul speaks of vessels to honour and vessels to dishonour, v 20. He speaks of the need to purify ourselves from vessels to dishonour, that we might be vessels to honour, fit for the Master's use. Peter also speaks of believers as vessels, 1 Pet 3: 7. That reference in Timothy touches what we were speaking about in the readings, because it is in the context of an analogy that Paul makes with a great house. Perhaps a great house was rather grander than a Roman villa at that time. There are the remains of Roman palaces, and there were such buildings even in the city of Jerusalem, ostentatious buildings. Paul had noticed, in relation to such structures, that there was a tendency to be careless about how the vessels in them were used. He is not saying that the golden vessels were vessels to honour, and the wooden vessels were vessels to dishonour; that is not the point, which is rather to establish how a vessel is used, and also what it contains. You could have quite a humble vessel, for example, that was only used for clean water. There is nothing dishonourable or unholy about that. On the other hand, you might have a gold vessel in which incense was burned to some heathen god, and the fact it was a gold vessel would not make it a vessel to

honour. So we need to consider such things, in judging our path, especially in our relations with others. It is not a question of appearance, but of what a particular person or vessel holds and also of what they may be free to associate with or to go on with. And these are the difficult questions, that a Christian encounters in life all the time. So at any rate, it is right to think of ourselves as vessels, and to recognise the need to keep them; and indeed to purify ourselves and to purge out associations with things that are inconsistent with the use of ourselves as vessels in the house of God.

I have been thinking about the history of the temple in Jerusalem, the house that Solomon had made, and it is not a very happy history. But it is marked on several occasions, by recovery. I think there were three or four times of recovery in the history of that temple, before it was lost to Nebuchadnezzar. And one thing I noticed, just looking at those histories, was that the recoveries, by and large, focused on the repair of the structure. In fact, on the first occasion, money had to be raised for repairs and for the reinstatement of priestly service, but apparently they did not have the money for utensils and vessels, 2 Kings 12: 13. So, in other words, they had to own, as time went on, repeatedly, that principles had been given up or they had been allowed to fall into disuse. The principles, the conduct of God's house, had been neglected, with the result that the glorious structure that had been at the first could no longer be seen as it should. Those are important things, and it is significant that one of the things we can be so thankful for, in history that precedes our lifetime, but with which we are familiar, is that principles have been recovered and reinstated among us. We walk, we trust, or seek to walk, in the light of them.

Now those times of recovery sadly came to an end, and the climax that the people speak of here, came about. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the structure, and he stole all the vessels. All the vessels were taken, as the people say here, to the temple in Babylon. If we apply the idea of vessels to God's people, we know about a few of those vessels, because we are told about them in the book of Daniel. Daniel and his three friends were like some of these vessels; they belonged in some way to the royal family in Judah, and they had been transported to Babylon. The first thing Nebuchadnezzar wanted to do was to fill them up with Babylonish things, train them in Babylonian knowledge and religion, and food and tastes; and even to change their names, so that the connection which each of their names had with the God they

had been brought up to know, should be displaced. We may have noticed that those four men had names, which, if interpreted, include reference to the name of God. None of those references survive in the names the King of Babylon wanted to give them. So he was making them - or thought to make them - vessels to dishonour. But they would not have it: they were prepared even to go into the fiery furnace. There was something indestructible, about those vessels, that even a fire heated seven times more than it was wont to be heated could not destroy, chap 3: 19. Even to drop one of these vessels into the den of lions could not destroy it or affect its integrity, chap 6: 16. They were set, they were determined, to be vessels that were fit for the Master's use, even though for the time being they were detached from the temple in which they had had their place, which itself had been destroyed. So that is the first way in which we see the vessels in the book of Daniel.

Then we read in Daniel 5 about Belshazzar, and Belshazzar's feast. He commanded that the vessels that belonged to God should be brought, to be used for unhallowed purposes, to be filled with wine, so that he and his nobles and concubines could drink out of them. The whole object in his careless, dissolute state, was to profane vessels that had been once held for the sanctuary of God. God would not have it. He entered in judgment into that unholy scene, and the author of it was destroyed. But that left the vessels in Babylon. And then we have another king arising, that they talk about here, and for reasons, maybe partly political, but under God's hand, he proposed the reinstatement of the temple in Jerusalem. I think it is interesting to see, that in this recovery, the prominence is given to the vessels.

There are two recoveries in the book of Ezra, and we have read an account of them both. The first one got as far as re-establishing the altar on its foundation, and the second one, in which Ezra personally had part, resulted in the reconstruction of the whole house. On both of those occasions, a shipment of vessels was made from Babylon. That is a very encouraging thing, beloved, that God is working on the principle of recovery and He is not working simply to re-establish principles, but is reclaiming what is precious to Himself among His people. I desire that we might pray for that. Obviously, we would love for company and fellowship of others, and the renewal of fellowship where those links have been lost for the time being, but how blessed it would be to see a recovery in which there was more for God. I make

that as a simple proposition from this passage, that the idea had been not only to reinstate the place and the altar, but to reinstate the service as a thing of activity for God's glory and praise.

What struck me about this first passage in chapter 5 is that the recovery did not get very far before very strong objections were made. There were these men who wanted the work to stop, and they had succeeded for a time. Now it had restarted, and they were preparing to write to the king to get his agreement that the work was unauthorised and should be prevented. They go over the sad history as the people had recounted it to them. The people had been quite honest and humble, as we should be, about things that had come in. They acknowledged freely that there had been unfaithfulness and that God had had to act in discipline. And we have to make the same kind of acknowledgements; we cannot avoid them. We might say it is others who have gone away, but the whole thing is a humbling experience. But then they are able to bring forward the proof that what they were doing was properly authorised and legitimate. I am not now concerned with the king's part in this, I am talking about this as it were in a moral way, and the proof they had that this work had been sanctioned, was that they had these vessels of God's house in Jerusalem, and the king had allowed it. Imagine what the situation would have been otherwise. Either the vessels would still have been in the temple in Babylon, or a question would have arisen about how it had come about that they were not. What they are able to show is that these vessels were quite properly restored to the place in which they belonged. The point I simply want to make from that is that the testimony that God is working in revival, and the testimony that God has a house here and that its service continues, is in His own: in the vessels. And it is a testimony that even those who were opposed had no answer to. So we need to ask ourselves, beloved, do we represent anything of that kind? Is our commitment to the service of God, and to His praise, and to what is due to Him, in His house, so clear and positive, and are the vessels hallowed and kept from what is impure to such an extent, that a clear testimony can be given that there is a work of revival here in which God Himself has His part, and which is for His pleasure and service? What a wonderful thing it was that they were able to say this. And when the king looked, he found that this was exactly what had been allowed. It was not only that they had been given permission to re-establish the principles and to follow design and all that kind of thing, or that they had been given certain rights and claims on materials, but they had the

vessels of the house of God, and it had been overruled by God that they should be recovered. It was in the recovery of those vessels that the presence and hand of God had been inarguably demonstrated. That raises a question with us all, beloved, whether that really is how things stand now. Are we resting on the past, are we resting on the history of what others were? Or could we say, 'Here are these vessels, and they are waiting to have their part in the service of praise'?

Then there was another recovery in which Ezra himself took the lead. And he brought more vessels from Babylon, as we have read, vessels of different kinds; and two very distinctive vessels. I draw to attention that they could not only be numbered, but they could also be weighed. And when they were brought, an account had to be given not only of their number, but of their weight. Ezra says here, "I weighed into their hand", and then it says, "the whole by number and by weight; and all the weight was written down". That raises a question with us all, because it is one thing to be in the headcount, one thing to be in the poll; but the question is for us all, which should be an exercise as far as we are concerned, being living vessels, whether it is a matter of increase with us. What is the weight? The value is in the weight, is it not? The value of these vessels lay in the weight. The measures they gave are measures of value by weight, talents. I think that is a wonderful thing. It is a remarkable thing also to be able to take account of in one another; that is what I am really concerned about. We need to be exercised about our own measure of course, but to look at one another and see each as recovered. You might go round to see how many brethren there are in your local meeting, and you may well be able to count very quickly; there may not be very many, but that is the number. But then you must consider what the weight is. How much regard do I have, in the way I carry my local brethren, the way I work with them, for the capacity, and about the value, about the measure, of what God has among His people? How much of a privilege do I hold it to be to walk with them and to work out God's service with them? How precious it is to see that.

I just draw attention to these two remarkable vessels; nobody can tell you really where they came from. They are said to be shining copper, but they were so shining that they were precious as gold. "Shining copper", it says, "precious as gold". One thing you might notice about them is, that although we know there were two, but we are not told what they weighed. All the other vessels we have an aggregate

weight for, but we are not told what these two vessels weighed. Somebody knew what they weighed because the whole was weighed, but we are not told what the weight is. I want to suggest that there is something about any brother or sister that only God knows; it is not for me to quantify it. It is for me to admire, the shining of it is something to be taken account of, but underneath that shining there is something that only God really knows. And the privilege is of walking with people that God knows - for the Lord knows those that are His - how precious that is, beloved, "precious as gold". The Lord has given us the privilege of walking with people He knows, as Paul says in 2 Timothy 2: 19.

I read in Mark's gospel, because I want to suggest that these two women are like those two vessels. I know other comparisons have been made. I remember once a comparison has been made suggesting that these two vessels represented Timothy and Titus, but I do not go into that. There is something about these two women that corresponds to these two vessels. Since we have resumed our local reading meetings, we have read about these two women and it is very striking, the way that they are brought in. If we just go back in the book a little bit, we have a parable about a man who had a vineyard, Mark 12: 1. He let it out to husbandmen who would not give him what it yielded. They capped their wicked behaviour by killing his son. Shortly afterwards there is another story, where the religious people tried to catch the Lord out by asking a question about the tribute money, v 13. And the Lord asked to see a coin, a very small coin it was. He asks whose image and superscription was on it, and He makes this comment, that they were to pay "what is God's to God", v 17. That of course was the problem with the husbandmen: they had not paid to God what was God's. And the Pharisees knew that He had spoken this parable of them; so they were under conviction they had not paid what was God's to God. So, this point is building up now. Then we have the Sadducees with this question about the woman who had had seven brothers as husbands and so on, and then a teacher asks what is the greatest commandment; and the Lord says, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thine understanding, and with all thy strength", v 30. In other words, putting it simply, the first and great commandment was pay what is God's to God. The Lord has come back to this point, and He makes it very simply. The man knew that was the first commandment; he recognised that that was right. I am not going on now to the second commandment about loving your brother, although that is very important. I thought it was

interesting that that question had arisen in the parable of the husbandmen, then it arises in the question about the tribute money, and then it arises in this question about which is the greatest commandment. And the answer in each three cases is the same: "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thine understanding, and with all thy strength".

Then this widow appears; and she had practically nothing. I actually find it quite hard to imagine somebody in such penury. She did not have a denarius to show whose image and superscription was on it. It was twice or maybe more than she actually possessed. That was all she had. But she loved the Lord her God, with all her heart, with all her soul, and with all her understanding and with all her strength. And she used that strength to put all her living into the treasury. We are told that there were a lot of other people, and I imagine a lot of clattering of money going into these treasury pots in the court of the women in the temple compound; I suppose most of them did not notice the widow. But the Lord noticed: He noticed the woman; He noticed how much she put in. He knew. He had weighed that vessel, and He said it was "more than all". Think of that. I think it is a great comfort to know what Paul says in Timothy, that "The Lord knows those that are his". The One who knows says this woman has cast in more than all - *more than all*. That was His assessment; in the balances of the sanctuary, that is what she weighed. I remember a brother said once he was sure there was a meal on her table when she got home, because God is "a judge of the widows", Ps 68: 5. He would not leave someone like this to fall into the destitution which from a natural point of view seemed imminent. But that is not said here; nothing is said about how she was taken care of. All that is brought out is that she loved the Lord her God. She was in a sense greater than all the commandments and sacrifices. Think of that - greater than them all!

I like to read in Deuteronomy where that commandment is given, chap 6: 5. We have first the tables of stone in chapter 5 but that commandment is not on the tables of stone; it does not say on the tables of stone thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. The tables were given to the people in the flesh who were incapable of keeping something like that. As God says, in Deuteronomy 5: 29, after He has given the ten commandments again: "Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments continually, that it might be well with them and with their sons forever!".

And then He says, "Hear Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah; and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart", chap 6: 4-5. In other words, the key to the whole matter was missing in Israel after the flesh: "the righteous requirement of the law" (Rom 8: 4) would be fulfilled in love. And that is what we see in this widow.

Now I come to this other lady in chapter 14, and she is right at the other end of the scale: she had something that was worth a fortune. But, like the poor widow, she gave it all to Christ - all of it. We have been speaking about the way the house of God is surrounded by an evil world, and this evil world presses in here. We have the betrayal going on, and the scheming behind that; we have even members of the company, people who were at the meal, getting angry with someone who wanted to give everything to Christ. What a tragedy that was, and yet she is not put off, nor does she hold anything back. I do not know how it would have been otherwise, but the language Mark uses suggests that, in order to get access to the fragrance in this alabaster vase, she broke it in a way that prevented any reuse. It would not have been possible to refill or re-stop this flask, from the way she broke it. It was an irreversible and irrevocable and unqualified committal out of love for Christ. She loved the Lord her God with all her heart, and all her soul, and all her understanding and all her strength. And again, she is weighed by the Lord; He says, "What *she* could she has done". "What this woman has done", He says, "shall be also spoken of for a memorial". What a thing that is, beloved. These two women, seen against the dark background of people away from God, are like these two vessels, shining precious as gold.

Now the last thought that I would like to bring in is this: having described those two women, and weighed them in the balances of the sanctuary, the gospel writer then comes to the Lord's supper. We might say that the Lord's supper is a provision that He has made for us. He speaks of it in that way, "This is my body", He says, "which is given for you", Luke 22: 19. So when we come to the Supper, we contemplate the kind of giving I have been speaking about: it was without reserve. What the Lord Jesus gave, represented in the emblems before us, is irrevocable: it was total, it was unqualified, it was final. "This is my blood", He says, "which is poured out for you", Mark 14: 24. Think of that! We learn in these things the love of Christ for us, the love of God for us, and we feast on these things, and we answer to them from our hearts' affections. But what came to me when we read this last Lord's

day was this, that the Supper was also provided for people like those two women. What I mean by that is that the Lord has not only provided it for us to remember Him, but He has provided it also so that we might use that occasion to show that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and all our understanding and all our strength. The Supper, beloved, is a love matter. It was not provided for ritualists; it was provided for lovers; by the great Lover for lovers; those who love each other. The kind of people who were in the Lord's mind were not timeservers or ritual-servers, or creatures of habit. When the Lord gave the Supper, the kind of people He had in mind who would take it are like these two women. And so it is today, beloved. My longing is that, as we contemplate them, and the way the Lord has brought them forward for our education, those features might mark us more, especially at that occasion.

May He bless the word.

GRIMSBY

10th July 2021

THE SETTING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Matthew 26: 26-30

DAB My thought was to speak of the setting in which the Supper was given - the love setting - and to explore what one and another might say about the motives that the Lord had in setting on the Supper. I have also carried the hope that the unfettered partaking of the Supper might be restored to us.

We have the idea in 1 Samuel 30: 20 of what is called David's spoil. That is to say, when something comes in that hinders or burdens the Lord's people, we are looking for more than relief from the burden. We should all be exercised that there should be spoil for the Lord out of it. We are not looking simply to resume the custom of taking the Supper in the form to which we are accustomed, but there might be some exercise with us all to take it up with fresh vigour and fresh desire.

The public health restrictions have affected all the brethren here in different ways, and to different degrees; and this should have thrown some focus on how the Lord gave this occasion, and also on why. What was He seeking for Himself? What was He intending to impart by establishing the Supper in this way? There has been among us generally an exercise that it is not appropriate or possible to depart from what the Lord prescribed for the Supper without losing what He gave. What the Lord gave has value, and we need to go over it freshly so that the Supper is taken up in a fresh way.

We might therefore look into the detail of the Lord's arrangement here and how He set on the Supper. I thought that the inhibition of the Supper has been the severest discipline we have had in the last period. I am not overlooking in saying that that some have shielded from any company at all. Some, because they are alone, have not been able to have the Supper, even in the form in which others of us have. Fellowship and meetings such as we had yesterday have also been interrupted. It has been a Christian custom since the very earliest days to be in one another's homes and that too has not been possible at times.

I chose Matthew's account because another thing over which restrictions have been placed is the Christian privilege to sing - and I have especially in mind the singing of hymns. I understand a hymn has something more in mind than a psalm, or a spiritual song, although there are those as well. To put what I understand simply, a hymn may

be thought of as the sung form of worship. David says, "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully, wonderfully made" (Ps 139: 14); we might say that we were made to praise, which includes the human ability. If it is applied in singing to God about who He is and how He has been revealed, that is the most exalted application of that faculty that we have. It therefore has its place rightly in the praise service; and this hymn we have read of is the only hint we have in the arrangements for the Lord's day that the Supper might be followed by a praise service.

HTF I think that touches a chord in all our hearts. When you think of what the Lord faced, when He set the matter on, you might ask if there could be any other thought in His mind than that God should be served. Yes: He had His own in mind, and He also speaks of the kingdom - "I drink it new with you in the kingdom of my Father". Do you think that should be a principle with us? If we think of recovery from the interruption of our gatherings - I believe we have had a taster of it today, although still with some limitations - there should be something added from our hearts. It would be something individually, but there should be something collectively. It may be in reduced circumstances, but in more spiritual depth.

DAB Yes that is my exercise. What you have said prompts a couple of thoughts about what was in the Lord's mind. His spirit was burdened with what was coming upon Him, which appears overwhelming. We see in Gethsemane what He was facing. But He does not speak of that here. However, this dark side is mentioned when He gives the Supper to Paul as we have it in 1 Corinthians. So, the disciples here were not able to enter anticipatively into that, but when we come to the Christian believers who took it up in Corinth, and ourselves here in Grimsby and wherever else, we know what followed. I am not saying we can fathom it, but we know what followed; we know what the night involved. We have to remember that the Lord knew anticipatively what it would be, and that was in His mind too. This reference to drinking it new has its own setting looking forward to the day when His own would be with Him; but the Lord is making a provision for the time when they would not be with Him. He was going to leave, and certain relations with them and certain activities they had shared together would cease. The Supper is provided to occupy that period. The Lord did not say how long His absence would be, but the Supper as He gave it has successfully occupied that period and still stands today.

AM In speaking of the emblems and their meaning, the Lord speaks

as if His work was already accomplished. "This is my body which is given", Luke 22: 19. "For this is my blood, that of the new covenant, that shed for many".

DAB Yes, that is a very important matter to bear in mind. I was speaking to someone last night about the recovery of that principle. In the Roman Catholic church, the Supper has been converted into a purported repetition of the sacrifice; and in the early days of the Reformation that was not understood to be wrong: some Protestants still hold that teaching. But others at that time saw that it was not a repetition of the sacrifice, but a remembrance - as they said - 'that Christ died for thee'. So, the altars were taken out of the churches and tables were put in their place. (Sadly, some altars have come back.) That is right so far, but the Lord does not say that the remembrance is that He 'died for thee'. What we have been brought to see is a "remembrance of me". It is very important, bearing in mind this history which permeates many gatherings for the Lord's supper, that the Lord's sufferings are presented as over. I am not saying we pass them by; but we do not exactly gather to remember His sufferings because they are completed. The Supper is, as it were, set on another shore. Is that your thought?

AM Yes indeed. What is before us is Himself.

DAB Yes exactly. Of course, His sufferings are suggested in the emblems, the breaking of the bread and the blood poured out. These things speak of His sufferings and they move us to contemplate the greatness of His love and the greatness of the Person whose love it is. I think we need to be sensitive about speaking to the Lord about His sufferings, and the first thing we have to remember is that we cannot fathom them. I would not care to speak to someone about an experience they had had that I felt unable to fathom; it would feel so superficial. We need to be reverential in speaking to the Lord about His sufferings.

HTF It is Himself that is the food.

DAB That is a different matter, 'we have Thee, Jesus, still', Hymn 229. That is something in which our appreciation can grow. I am not saying our appreciation of His sufferings do not grow, but we must always remember 'suff'rings unfathomed', Hymn 4. It is not possible to fathom them.

RDP It is interesting that in this presentation, it says "as they were

eating” which would be the Passover. It says, “having taken the bread and blessed”, and note b says, 'Or, 'given thanks". It is as if everything that then follows is preceded and cloaked by that first thing the Lord did as having taken the bread; He gave thanks. It is not exactly a repetition of the suffering, but overwhelming thankfulness. It was His desire to be with them.

DAB I think many households have rested on that simple word because it makes the conduct of the Supper such a simple thing. No doubt the brothers here can all remember when they did not feel they had the measure to go to the table. That may be because they were aspiring to the measure of those who did go to the table. But this is so simple. I am sure there are young brothers who may never have gone to the table at the room, but they felt free to continue the Supper in their homes because what they had to do is shown here to be so simple. I do not know to what extent that is something that we need to preserve. I am not saying we want to strip out the spiritual quality that has entered into many thanksgivings for the emblems, but at the same time we should remember that this is fundamentally simple.

RDP As having some considerable experiences of this, like all of us in the house, things have come to light in simplicity, because that was of necessity. One of the things is that the variety of hymns has increased. Some of us have used hymns that would be regarded as not normally hymns for the Lord's day morning, but somehow there has been released a spirit of thankfulness in hymns, which I have found quite interesting. I do not know whether other brethren think that, part of this real measure of thankfulness.

DAB I think one of the important things about this reference to the hymn is that we are not told what the words were. It is called “a hymn” and I believe that the Lord must have composed it for the occasion. In other words, the disciples did not know it before they sang it for this first time. The Lord's lead was so effective that they were able to join in. That is a remarkable spiritual fact, if that is what happened. If we had been given the words, we would have them every week, like the Lord's prayer in the churches; and that would take away what you have just said. Simply to say there was a hymn without saying what the words were gives the scope for what you have been talking about.

EJM This was preceded by the Lord “being in Bethany, in Simon the leper's house, a woman having an alabaster flask of very precious ointment came to him and poured it out upon his head as he lay at

table”, Matt 26: 6-8. Does that help your thought; as gathering there is something very precious in the souls of the saints?

DAB Yes, that impression came to me when we read the corresponding passage in Mark at our local reading last Lord's day. We had been quite occupied with the two women; the widow with two mites and the woman in the house of Simon the leper: they seem to be an important link in Mark's narrative. Then we have the treacherous public background, what was happening publicly; and then we have the Supper. It raised the question with me that is raised in 1 Corinthians, about proving ourselves. That is not simply a kind of purgative process, but it would help to ask whether we love like those women did. To give some impetus to that question, was it for people who loved like that that the Supper was given? I am thinking about the way the brethren have continued the Supper as far as they have been able - and I do respect that not everyone has been able to have it all through the last sixteen months - but the way the brethren have committed themselves to maintaining it in the house has been a matter of love. That has maintained the freshness of it beyond what we may have expected.

TJH Do the different details in all of the four scriptures need to be borne in mind together? Here we have the eating. Another scripture contemplates more the memorial, “remembrance of me”, Luke 22: 19. You have pointed out differences in the presentation in 1 Corinthians 11. There is something else that has been very precious to me as having the Supper in the house. It is “until he come”, 1 Cor 11: 26. That is only there in Corinthians, as if the Lord would add that from the glory, that extra detail: “until he come”. It is another important detail. I know it is not where you read, but if we consider it all together it would be something important, do you think?

DAB It is very interesting to contemplate that the Lord was very prescriptive up to a certain point, as if the thought He had in His mind could only be captured if certain things were done. That is why the brethren have not been free to have couplets, for example, because the Lord is very prescriptive: “Drink ye all of it”. There are other things that He was not prescriptive about. He does not say how often the Supper should be held, for example, how often should it be taken and for how long. The passage in Corinthians is interesting because the Supper will not continue once He has come for us; those who have taken it will be gone. But it has His public appearing in view. I do not think Paul is exactly presenting a timeline, but it is more an objective that we have

before us, that we gather in the night in which He was delivered up. We gather in that night in the light of His universal acclamation; that gives a big span for our hearts to cover.

RWMcC I was just thinking about the way the Supper has been taken up in the household setting. It is not that we sit down to take the Supper as a family or as husband and wife. It has to be on the same basis that we have always gathered; it is affection for the Lord drawing us as brethren to remember Him. That was the thought that helped me. It lifts the occasion above formality and ritualism like you have spoken of.

DAB A brother and I were sharing an account of how a family came into fellowship long ago in Nebraska, and the occasion of it was a visit to their home by Mr Joseph Pellatt. A number of family and neighbours had been holding a breaking of bread, and Mr Pellatt said they seem to be simple souls, and he would like to be free to break bread with them. But there would need to be order and, as a condition of his willingness to break bread with them, he wanted to ask the sisters to wear hats. A woman said she would never wear a hat in her own house; and Mr Pellatt said, when we come to the Supper, it is not our house any more: it is the house of God. That cleared the difficulty; she was subject. It has been an exercise since our numbers were so reduced in 1970. I know of households where brethren broke bread with the family in the house, and it was quite an exercise to instil in the children that this was not just something you do in the sitting room: the Supper was different.

TJH I have been noticing recently at home that the Epistle to Philemon is addressed, "and to the assembly which is in thine house", v 2. I wonder if that would fit in with what you are suggesting about these household settings that have been prevalent lately.

DAB The Epistle to Philemon is interesting in that way; because everyone assumes that Apphia was Philemon's wife, but Paul does not say so; he calls her a sister. In other words, it is the relation she had to the fellowship that mattered as far as Paul was concerned, not the natural relationship that may well have existed.

HTF We understand in the early days of the recovery of the truth that brethren broke bread together perhaps daily sometimes. It is not to say that that was wrong, but it was born out of the exercise they carried. At the beginning it may have been daily.

DAB Actually the way early believers gathered in homes is difficult to imagine. We cannot conceive that the company in Jerusalem all met in

one place: that was impossible; they would have needed to use the theatre to do that. So they met in houses; they broke bread in the house. That simplicity is accommodated by what the Lord says here. There is no prescription to have a meeting hall for this purpose. There is no prescription about the accommodation. There is a suggestion that it should be quiet and separate and provided by someone who is favourable. I think the brethren might feel awkward to share accommodation where some other uses are prominent. It is not ideal, but we leave all that with the spiritual sensibilities of our brethren. Is it possible to focus on the purpose of the occasion?

RDP I have always felt it must be of import that, where you began to read it says, “as they were eating” the passover, which was an annual event. If you read the account of “the feast of unleavened bread” (Matt 26: 17) there was treachery and the Lord suffering; they were grieved with one another and so on, but they were eating the passover. All that the passover involved was met in the death of the Lord Jesus and all those things were met. The idea “as they were eating” seems to suggest that they were appropriating that. It was in an atmosphere for the appropriation of all that side of things that the Supper is introduced. It is not exactly as some further indictment of all that men did, but something special. It is a love matter, a matter of thankfulness.

DAB Mr Pellatt has a very good article on the Supper as the focus of Christian fellowship, Closing Ministry, p 1. He observes that when the passover was instituted the *household* slew the passover. That was the commandment; the households did it. By the time we come to this period of the history the priests were doing it at the temple. Then Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5: 7, “For also our passover, Christ, has been sacrificed”. It is not now what we do. We appropriate what God and Christ together have done. That is accomplished and we appropriate that. It is not that the occasion is regulated by our measure; the eating might represent our measure, but we are eating of something that in itself has a divine measure.

RDP That was my thought; that it is what precedes the Supper, not exactly occupies it, but it is in believers' affections and knowledge as they came together. The Supper flowed out of the passover.

DAB Yes, and the passover was the means not only whereby the judgment could be escaped, but the world on which that judgment fell could be left behind. We cannot take the Supper with the world in our spirits. We would like to be free of that burden that the world imposes in

taking the Supper.

HTF It is clear a distinction is made in relation to the bread and the cup, and that there would have been blessing in connection with, "having taken the bread and blessed", and then, "having taken the cup and given thanks". That is important, that we do not just give thanks and pass both emblems round. There is something distinctive in relation to His body and in relation to His blood and what they represent.

DAB That is my exercise. It is very easy for us to say we will not have wafers and cuplets because that is not what the Lord gave, but there is no food in such a statement. Why did the Lord do it this way without running the two emblems together, with thanks for each? You might say we re-enact that, but how far are we entering into His mind and His spirit in doing that?

EJM In Matthew 16 the Lord asks, "Who do men say that I the Son of man am?". If you go by men He was the carpenter's son, that is men's view, but Peter said, "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the living God, 16: 15, 16. Do you think that involves progress in our souls? Paul speaks to Timothy of your progress being manifest, 1 Tim 4: 15. If a believer wants to break bread, we really need to know that there is something vital there as there was in Peter, "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the living God".

DAB I think so, and we could say that the Lord found what the Father had done attractive. We are exercised rightly about being drawn to Christ, but He is drawn to the Father's work in us too; it attracts Him; "I will see you again", John 16: 22. That is one of the things that is striking about the Supper. As the passover came around, they reminded the Lord it was time to be making arrangements; they asked what they should do and He sent them to make the arrangements. There is not a word of them asking how He was to be remembered in the time of His absence. None of them speak as the Supper was instituted; they just do as they are told. That is very striking, that there is no human input; the mind of man is not there at all. It is something very pure. It leaves the question as to what was in the Lord's mind; to which the simple answer is that *they* were in His mind. This reference the Lord makes about not eating any more meals with them shows that leaving them was a wrench. We may feel very unworthy, but the Lord enjoyed their company and He speaks of them persevering with Him. He makes the best of the way they had walked with Him, because He saw the Father's work in them; He saw that work expressing itself. They were men that

the Father had given Him. They had not been given to the Lord as raw material, but they had been given to Him as already the subjects of the Father's work. The Lord cannot leave those people in a world of evil without some arrangement to maintain His relationship with them livingly.

HTF He was going to beg the Father to give the Holy Spirit, John 14: 16.

DAB Yes indeed, and He also had in mind their unity of which this is the expression. It is hard to see that now because believers are breaking bread all over the place and, as we have seen in the last fifteen months, there has not even been agreement as to how it is to be done. The Lord had the unity of His own in mind, and He gave them one loaf to share and one cup to share. The communion of His blood, it is called, 1 Cor 10: 16. That is the foundation of unity among the people of God.

GJR As to the separate thanksgiving for the cup following the thanksgiving for the loaf, it is very clear when we assemble that the Lord is absent; He is not here. That colours the thanksgiving for the loaf. When the loaf is back on the table, is the Lord absent or are we addressing Him as One who has come in? I find that demanding spiritually, and it is more demanding to give thanks for the cup than to give thanks for the loaf. We gather in His absence - everything convinces us that He is absent - but when we approach the cup has the ground changed?

DAB It is worth reading some of the history about this in Mr James Taylor's early ministry. He had to contend somewhat for the proposition that the Lord was absent, and there were quite respected brothers who could not see it. They thought that the Lord was always here. The idea that the Lord might come in and go out took some time to get used to. The Lord is identified with us in the testimony, but it is perfectly clear that He is not in the world about us, and that we gather in His absence.

A lady once visited at the Supper where I was. She said afterwards that she had been to all kinds of different places but it was the first place she had been where the company spoke to the Lord as if He was present. She noticed that the language we used implied that He was there, which she had not experienced anywhere else. That is not to make anything of us because we are not conscious of making an effort to do that. The question about when the Lord comes in is one that brethren have gone over in more or less spiritual ways. I remember Mr

Jim Renton saying that he felt that the sense that the Lord was present dawned on him gradually. I remember another brother saying about how we may tell if the Lord is present, that you sense that the hearts of His people open. It is not as if someone has come and put the lights on; it is more that there is a growing awareness that fills the spirit and heart of the believer, and others in the company become aware that this is happening to them and everyone else. It comes out in the way that brothers express themselves and the hymns they choose and the way they are sung. Is that practical or is it a bit unreal?

GJR I do not think I could answer that. The great thing is that we should provide conditions for the Lord to come. I am still thinking of your opening question as to what the Lord's motives were, especially what was He looking for, for Himself. The very last thing we must do is ever to make a claim. I would like to think that the Lord comes near. I would like to think that there would be something special for Him. The character of thanksgiving would be different from the point at which we come together. When we give thanks for the loaf there is no question that we have come together to remember an absent Lord. If He makes Himself known I would like to grasp that.

DAB It would be contrary to any motive we could imagine the Lord having for Him to mystify His manifestation. Why would He do that? He wants to fill the hearts of His lovers: why would He hide and make it difficult to know whether He is there or not? That is not natural; we could not imagine Him being like that. From His side, He is employing means to make His own aware that He has come, and those means touch the hearts of His own and they stir something there. He does not need something outward because He can reach into and touch the hearts of His own, and with divine skill do so freshly on every occasion.

GJR I like what you have quoted from Mr Renton. I know it is a different setting, but there was the day in John 21: 7 when John says, "It is the Lord". Everything that was happening was adding up to one thing, and that is, "It is the Lord".

DAB Having said it should be fresh every time, maybe I could just add a comment about Luke 24 and the occasion in Emmaüs. That is not the Supper as I understand it - there is no cup, for one thing. The Supper is more than what they had, but He made Himself known to them in the breaking of bread. He did something in a way that reminded them of Him. He did it without being asked; He gave that kind of lead; it was His custom to do that. There was something about the way He did it that

was more convincing even than His appearance, because He was not recognised by His physical appearance. He did something in a way that was hallmarked. Although we look for something fresh, the Lord does not puzzle us by appearing unrecognisably every time. There is something that He engages with; He engages with what we are familiar with, and the emblems have that purpose. He wants to make it easy to manifest Himself.

TJH The actual act of breaking of bread is something I think is very important. It says in Acts 20, “we being assembled to break bread” (v 7), and we come to that moment when the loaf is broken. I think the brethren have generally thought over the years that was a very important moment. When we come to the cup it is the cup of blessing which we bless. The sufferings involved in the shedding of blood, the sufferings are finished, they are over; the cup is another emblem of His love. Here we have, “For this is my blood, that of the new covenant”. We have come to something completely additional for which we rightly give an additional thanksgiving for.

DAB I do not think it is right to be too prescriptive about when exactly the Lord comes in, because we can give the wrong impression that if anyone is not moved at the very moment, they have missed Him. That is not right. The sense that the Lord is present grows on you. You may not be in a particularly spiritual frame of mind, but you are in the company of people who may be more spiritual than you are. You get caught up in what they are beginning to enjoy, and mercifully and thankfully you get drawn into the stream of it; and that is the Lord's gracious touch.

AM There may be a difference between the Lord's own movements and my apprehension of them.

DAB Exactly. I love the two references which are in apposition in John's gospel. He says, “A little while and ye do not behold me; and again a little while and ye shall see me”, John 16: 17. That is their apprehension, and they are a bit puzzled by that. Then He says, “I will see you again”, v 22. All His longings flood out in that. He would not have any doubt about whether they were there. If they were there He would know. He would serve us in a way that makes us as certain of His presence as He is of ours.

AM What you say is helpful. In practice we find that there may be something, it may be in contemplating the cup and the liberty that the

new covenant would bring us into, or it may be a hymn, or what somebody says, there is suddenly a quickening of affection; and then you have to say like John, "It is the Lord".

DAB Yes, I think so.

EJM In John 20: 19 it says, "When therefore it was evening on that day, which was the first day of the week, and the doors shut where the disciples were, through fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst". I think it would be right to say that the Lord comes in the sovereignty of His love. He did not go to the Jewish synagogue; those doors were shut to keep out the Jews, but He came and He comes. I just say to myself that I have to prepare myself if the Lord is coming; we need self-judgment as a continual thing.

DAB In the limited circumstances in which we have broken bread over the last months, those of us who have been able to have felt that the Lord has poured in more grace; when we have been together normally, I have been glad to be caught up in what is expressed in the company. I am not of course to be a passenger and lean on other people, but it is an experience to feel what is touching the spirits of other brethren. If others are not there, you are more in the Lord's hands. If we are able once again to meet together in a normal way, then we should remember that what is stirring and expressed, and even the countenances of the brethren, are assets that we can use to get caught up into the service of praise.

AM I think many have found that there has been great confirmation at the Supper. There has also been much more exercise. If we are allowed to meet together more normally the exercise should not diminish.

DAB That is where the spoil would come in; not only would that exercise not diminish: it should become much more possible to share it with other people.

RWMcC I remember once quoting a remark that we break bread in the wilderness, and we take the cup in His presence. A brother who was taking the meeting said, 'Yes but do we?'. That was quite a challenge. It is not just a belief that we hold. One thing I have found recently is that it is not planned. You cannot sit down and plan out the Supper, even when you are going to be the only brother there. There is a flow to it which perhaps comes a bit more attenuated because of the circumstances.

DAB I agree with that. I do not want to say I can be lethargic and eventually I will get it; that is not love's approach. At the same time, to present the Lord's coming in as a mechanical thing seems to miss the whole point.

TJH I once heard a brother say that we 'call the Lord into presence'. I wonder if he meant to say it that way: we cannot do that because He is a divine Person and, as our brother here said, He comes, it is His prerogative to come. All of us that have had the experience in our little circumstance in our homes and He comes. It is very wonderful.

DAB It is a simple truth that you cannot tell a divine Person what to do. You do not need to because the Lord arranges it, not us.

HTF I was thinking that when He comes *for* us there will be no doubt. Every one of His own is known to Him. We are speaking about when He comes *to* us. You cannot think of that being a different Lord, a different character or different persons. He comes for all His own; it may be only a few are available when we take the Supper.

DAB It is interesting that the description of the Lord's voice goes out of its way to make it unmistakeable: "archangel's voice and with trump of God", 1 Thess 4: 16. You cannot miss that. I do not think the world will hear it, but no believer can miss that sound. In addition to the power of it, what will catch the believer up is the recognition of whose voice it is. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them", John 10: 27.

RDP In this scripture as to John and the abortive fishing expedition, Jesus appears to them on the shore. John says, "It is the Lord". I remember Mr Walkinshaw saying that is probably the shortest prophetic word in the scripture. These were unprecedented circumstances. They had had a frustrating night and it was difficult. It was all potential: there were actually plenty fish there, they just were not catching them. The Lord comes in and He comes in in His own way. I do not think we can prescribe. He makes Himself known in His own way. In the heart of one of His lovers there is a note struck. I just thought it was a lovely touch that it was a prophetic word. The prophetic word is identification of the Lord.

DAB John does not say what his cue was; he does not say what prompted him to say that. The Lord was standing on the shore. Something in John's heart told Him that this was the Lord. I suppose it was unexpected. They were at the opposite end of the country to where they had last seen Him and yet John's heart awoke.

RDP It was on the shore and would have implied some distance presumably. There was something there, perhaps like Luke 24, where their eyes were opened. It is the eyes of our heart, not like our natural eyesight in that sense. A combination of things causes recognition.

DAB Another thing about the Emmaüs journey is the distance the Lord went in order to be known to be in the company of His own; the way Luke presents it is very precious. I remember a brother talking about the times of the meetings on Lord's day, and he said it is supposed to be a day of rest. He was reminded that it is a day of activity, and we see that in the Lord. I am not saying we should rush around like we did years ago. But look at that journey that the Lord made just for two of them.

TJH I wonder if you would say some more about "having sung a hymn". It seems to be like a line of demarcation. We have rightly said we break bread in the wilderness. The Lord is not here, but He comes in, and we become assured that He has come in. This is as if the emblems being back on the table, we could perhaps say that this is the next hymn that we sing, "having sung a hymn". We seem, as we had the experience this morning, to have gone into the land. We have gone into a higher plain. I wonder if you could say something more as to what change there is between that and what we have come to call the service of praise.

DAB There is a lot of Jewish tradition about singing psalms at the passover and some imagine that that tradition was working here. As a matter of history, it was not: that tradition began years afterwards. I think that if it was a psalm, it would have been called a psalm. Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs are distinguished. We cannot imagine that one of the disciples gave it out; so it must have been the Lord who set it on. Maybe they had not sung hymns like this before and this was something new. I wonder if it answers to the new covenant in a way. God is establishing ground in which He can be with His people and in return His people celebrate Him for what He is. That seems to be a kind of balance to me. The Lord says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood", Luke 22: 20. It was not just a thanksgiving that their sins were to be remitted, although they were no doubt very grateful to hear that. Suddenly the greatness of God and what He is and how He had been declared in Christ filled their hearts and made them leadable in the service of praise.

RDP The note f, if you follow it through to Hebrews, is interesting as to

“sung a hymn”: it says, “Or, 'praise *thee* with singing', Lit. 'hymn thee". That same word is used in the gaol, as to Paul and Silas in Acts 16. That was brought about by circumstances very different to what we have here. Whatever it was, the prisoners listened to them, in the midst of dreadful conditions there. It is transport. This moves from one scene of things to another.

DAB It does not say here that they went out to Gethsemane: “they went out to the mount of Olives”. There was some sense of release in their spirits. I am overwhelmed to think the Lord had so much weighing down on His spirit,

On that same night, Lord Jesus,
When all around combined
To cast its darkest shadow
Across Thy holy mind. (Hymn 435)

But He is able to lead them in the service of praise. How much more so when that night is past, 'That night for ever past', Hymn 246.

RWMcC I know it is a different day, but I was thinking of what it says in Revelation: “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open its seals; because thou hast been slain, and hast redeemed to God, by thy blood, out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation”, chap 5: 9, 10. The work is done but it remains ever remembered. Everything is established on the basis that it is done.

DAB Redemption involves the glad tidings of place. God removes every other claim but His own so that He can put what He has purchased in the place of His own choosing. That is redemption. It is not just wiping the slate. That is only part of the matter. He has redeemed to God. That is new ground, it is a new place.

RDP Redemption involves the restoration of an encumbered right, something which God had in the beginning.

DAB It removes every other claim, the claim of sin, the claim of the law, the claim of the world - all these claims, and the claim of death. God has removed all those claims, He has removed every claim but His own, at great cost; and then He is free to put the redeemed in the place of His choosing. They come to God.

EJM It is the great end in redemption, the fact that we have been redeemed from Egypt, the world, my sins, it is redeemed to God.

DAB The best illustration I have had is Ruth. She does not give the full thought because there is no sacrifice in Ruth, no blood. The gospel is “redemption through his blood”, but Ruth ended up joint owner with Boaz of fields in which she had once gleaned as a stranger. Her status is completely transformed by the work of redemption. She is brought into association with the person whose inheritance it is.

HTF There is no formal end to the occasion you are speaking of.

DAB No exactly. We do not know how long the hymn was.

Grimsby

11th July 2021

List of initials:-

D A Burr, West Norwood; H T Franklin, Grimsby; T J Harvey, East Finchley; E J Mair, Buckie; A Martin, Buckhurst Hill; R W McClean, Grimsby; R D Plant, Birmingham; G J Richards, Malvern

LOWLINESS AND MEEKNESS

Andrew Martin

Ephesians 4: 1-6

This section has been in my mind a little, today, and I have been thinking particularly of the two features of lowliness and meekness, because it seems that the apostle is saying that these are features which are suited to the calling. We speak of our calling, “the calling wherewith ye have been called”. We often relate it in our minds to the most exalted things. We have been called to sonship; that is a wonderful thing, a wonderful blessing; and it is a wonderful thing to be enjoyed, as we do. I am sure that enters into the experience of the saints every week; we have been called to sonship; and, in a sense, there is nothing greater. We have our part in the assembly: we have our part down here, but we have been called to sonship. There is a hymn of Mr Darby's which says,

And here we walk as sons (Hymn 120).

And yet sonship is really connected with our heavenly portion. So, as we go through this scene, people do not look upon us as sons: it is a secret that we carry. We are here as sons. But the apostle says, “I ... exhort you to walk worthy of the calling”, worthy of sons. Someone might say that in that case, as we are in the most exalted relationship possible, it would surely mean that we would walk in full confidence and superiority to what is around, and of course, the believer is superior to what is around; but what is suitable to sons are these features of lowliness and meekness, as well as “long-suffering, bearing with one another in love”, and so on.

These are features which marked the Lord Jesus, lowliness and meekness. He speaks of it Himself, saying “Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened ... for I am meek and lowly in heart”, Matt 11: 28, 29. You think of the meekness and lowliness of Jesus. It has been commented by others that meekness has particularly to do with our relations with one another, and lowliness has particularly to do with how we are before God. You can understand that, can you not, that God is infinite in His greatness, and we are creatures, and we are to be marked by lowliness before Him. In relation to one another, we are to be marked by meekness. I think these features are found among the brethren; I am not implying that there is any shortcoming, but calling attention to the fact that these are features of Jesus; and if we are to be

here in accord with our highest calling, these are the most fundamental features that we are to display, meekness and lowliness. You think of it: even when He established His claim to the throne, and He came into Jerusalem, it was riding upon the ass in order to fulfil the word of the prophet, "Behold, thy King cometh ... lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass", Zech 9: 9. You think of the Lord coming in in that way, being borne in. I suppose we may also think of this in relation to the present testimony, that the features of Jesus are borne by those who have the privilege of carrying the present testimony in these days. I was thinking of the colt, the foal of an ass: every firstling of an ass had to be ransomed, (perhaps for us, redeemed); that is one of the very early pieces of legislation that came out in relation to Israel, Exod 13: 13. There was a product of redemption in figure, carrying the testimony, because at that time Jesus was the testimony. Think of what that means today for we who have been redeemed: every redeemed soul has been called to bear the testimony and to bear it in a particular way, in meekness and in lowliness.

He goes on to say, "using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace". The unity of the Spirit exists; every believer who has the Spirit is bound together in the uniting bond of peace. Satan comes in, the difficulties come in to disrupt it, but the unity of the Spirit exists; and Paul says, "There is one body and one Spirit". What a precious thing that is, that there is one body. There is that here upon the earth which corresponds to what was seen in the Lord Jesus Himself, one body and one Spirit. There is a divine Person here who has taken His abode in the assembly, and by His coming here has formed the one body. The one body was formed at Pentecost, although it was not fully expressed then. It required Paul's ministry really to bring out the truth of it. It also required Peter's ministry, bringing in the Gentiles; it required all that to bring out the expression of the body, but the body existed, it existed then, and we have been brought into it.

And then, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism"; we own one Lord, there is only one. The prophet says, "other lords than thee have had dominion over us" (Isa 26: 13), but we own one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The truth that believers should hold is the truth that should be held by, and is applicable to, every believer. There is just "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all". You think of the apostle saying of God even to

heathens, “in him we live and move and exist”, Acts 17: 28. The presence of God is everywhere in the sense that there is nothing hidden from Him. How wonderful it is to be conscious of that.

Well, this passage has been in my mind, dear brethren. I feel the test of it: lowliness and meekness, the features of Jesus Himself being displayed in this way. If we think of long-suffering, what long-suffering He showed. “Bearing with one another”: how He did that; He said, “how long shall I bear with you?”, Mark 9: 19. Think of bearing with one another, not just in patience but in love, using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit. The unity of the Spirit is a precious thing. May we hold to it, may we seek to maintain it constantly.

For His Name's sake.

Word in meeting for ministry, Buckhurst Hill

8th June 2021

FOOD

Terry W Lock

John 6: 31-33

Judges 6: 11-14

1 Kings 17: 2-10 (to “went to Zarephath”)

I have been thinking a little bit about this matter of food, food that God provides, food that is given freely and food that is given with reason.

Here in John 6 is one of the most remarkable things, because it is food that is given by the hand of God and the Lord is speaking here of Himself. That, of course, is the best food. So the Lord is speaking here to these persons who were speaking about what had happened historically in relation to the food that had come to the people while they were going through the wilderness, before they got to the Jordan. In all of those forty years they were provided with food by the hand of God, and they were provided with drink by the hand of God. These persons were living on that historical fact, that they had been given that food; but food is not historical. Food is present; food is now. If you do not eat food today or tomorrow and you do not eat it for the next two or three weeks you will die; food is for the present.

So these persons were speaking about what God had provided historically. Jesus speaks about what God provides at present, and that is a wonderful thing. They said, “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat. Jesus therefore said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, It is not Moses that has given you the bread out of heaven; but my Father gives you the true bread out of heaven”. What a wonderful thing that is. Beloved brethren, in any measure, whatever your appetite, whatever your desire, be it great or small, to feed on something of Jesus is wonderful. It builds up your soul; it sustains your spirit and sets you for heaven.

Now maybe you do not have a great desire, but I can say that in my life I have learned that it is good to create that desire, for God loves to give you the true Bread out of heaven, to give you something of Christ: something for your own soul; something which will bear eternal fruit for God and for you. So that is a most remarkable thing. We cannot live on things that are merely historical. Quite often we look, and rightly so, at ministry that has gone before, but the true Bread that comes down out of heaven is current. That does not set aside what has

gone before, but you need to feed on what is coming now. And that is important.

There is the food that God provides directly, but then there is the food that God provides through others. Now here is this widow woman and you might ask why God chose a widow woman. Why did God dry up the torrent in the first place? Why did He not continue with that? Elijah was satisfied with what he had at the torrent; why did it not continue? Why did the ravens just not continue to bring food? God was moving forward in relation to this widow woman so that she could provide something for the man of God. He gave her opportunity to set forward His work in the testimony by this means. That is why He dried up the torrent, and that is why He stopped the ravens. That is a remarkable thing, beloved brethren. We ought to be able to feed and help forward somebody set for the testimony, to help them forward according to the mind of God, and have something to give them so that the testimony goes forward, so that the prophetic word can go forward. This widow woman was chosen for that; what a precious thing! There would have been times, I have no doubt without being fanciful, when this widow woman would have remarked to herself, thought upon it herself, how richly God had blessed her in allowing the prophet to come to her house. What a privilege to be able to provide, and to allow God to have the scope to provide, by you, something for the prophet. It is an exercise to have food according to God for an individual in the testimony.

But then we come to Gideon, and Gideon lived in a time when there was what was governmental in the discipline of God on the people of Israel. The trouble covered the whole land, which is quite a thing when you think about it. Perhaps there were some who might have told Gideon that he was not being subject to what was governmental of God. But Gideon is working out food for the people. There will always be adverse circumstances, beloved brethren; and there will always be limitations that God has allowed governmentally, until the Lord comes; but we will never overcome for the testimony in those circumstances without food. Gideon was not being lawless here; Gideon was looking for the well-being of the people. What he was doing did not step outside of what God allowed governmentally. Gideon was exercised in relation to the people having food; and protecting it, so that they could. That also is a very great exercise because this was not personal; this was in relation to the people of God testimonially at that time. He had this exercise, and without any instruction from anybody, without having it

laid upon him other than what was there in his own heart, he went and procured wheat for this reason. It does not say how he procured wheat, or how all of that happened; all it says is that he was threshing wheat in the winepress. This was a hard place to thresh wheat. A winepress is round, and small, and cramped. I do not know how many of the brethren have actually seen one but they are very restrictive, and yet he is threshing wheat there. It took great exercise and hard work, but why did he do it? He had an exercise. While there was what was governmental of God on the whole scene, while there was great restriction, while there was smallness, he had an exercise that the people of God be fed. And God used him because of his exercise of heart. God speaks in relation to him this way - "And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him, and said to him, Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour". Why is he a mighty man of valour? Valour is seen in war and he has not fought a war. He has not done anything so far except thresh wheat. Eventually God would use him in a war to preserve the people, but God saw in Gideon's heart the exercise to preserve the people by providing for them, and subsequently used him to deliver them. It is what God saw in the heart of Gideon. What a wonderful thing that is.

So, beloved brethren, these are just three things. And in a certain sense God provided all of them, but in two of them God used persons. May we be those persons, beloved brethren. May we feed on Christ, but because we feed on Christ may we be those persons who are able to provide for the individuals, and for the company, what is collectively going to be for God.

May we be encouraged in this for His Name's sake.

Word in Ministry Meeting, Edinburgh

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