

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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CONTENTS

Jesus in Gethsemane

Page 1

Jesus Crucified

Page 11

Increasing Appreciation of Christ

Paul A Gray

Page 22

JESUS IN GETHSEMANE

Mark 14: 32-72

RB It is affecting to see the Lord in Gethsemane with all the pressure that bore in on His spirit. That would be anticipative of what the will of His Father would involve for Him; so He utters the expression, "My soul is full of grief even unto death". Then He felt it that these three disciples were with Him but were unable to watch. Three times He comes to them; it is easy to think about how the disciples were unable for this, but I have to recognise that, in my own heart, I have not thought sufficiently of what the Lord went through in Gethsemane, the sorrows that bore in on Him. There is depth to be added to the soul as we consider the way that, as the perfect Man, He addresses His Father and brings out what the will of the Father would entail in taking the cup from His Father's hand. Then we have the section as to Judas and what that involved.

There is a majesty about verse 42 and the Lord's words, "Arise, let us go". He moves forward of His own volition, aware of what was about to transpire, but was not deterred or turned aside by it. And then there were the false witnesses that were brought against Him and the suffering from the hands of man, which we have in verse 65, and Peter's betrayal. Peter learned from this, and we get the benefit of it and the fruit of it in his epistles.

Mr James Taylor said that this was 'the greatest battle ever fought', vol 17 p227. It adds tone to our worship: as we experience the heights of what the service of God involves, it all depended on this, that the Lord Jesus went this way and took from His Father's hand all that His will entailed. It was referred to in thanksgiving in Hymn 330 -

Great the cost to Thee, blest Father.

We think of that in connection with the cross, but we see something of that in this section as to Gethsemane too, would you say?

AW Yes. As you were speaking, I was thinking of the first hymn we had -

Thou Lord to death's domain
Didst go alone. (Hymn 152)

I wonder if we see that throughout this section; everybody else failed or was unable for it; so the Lord Jesus in His prayer was alone, but He went through it all to fulfil what was before Him.

RB No one else could have gone this way. Only He could take on what the divine will involved and carry it out in its fulness and in perfection. Those He took with Him were no comfort to Him here; so, in that sense, He was alone. In Gethsemane, He would anticipate the time when He would be forsaken of God and be truly alone. Here, of course, He is in communion with His Father, but He is going through all that the cross and being made sin would involve, and that bears on His spirit and causes Him to be “amazed and oppressed in spirit” or, as the note says, ‘deeply depressed’. Think of the Lord Jesus in manhood suffering to that extent in His spirit. He was to suffer in His body; He was to suffer in actuality from His God; but it seems that the whole thing is borne in His spirit in this setting and that alone, between Himself and His Father.

JAB How privileged we are to have this insight; we should be affected by it. I felt as I read it this morning that we need to be freshly affected by it despite the words themselves being so familiar. What a privilege it is that the Holy Spirit thought it right through the pen of Mark and some of the other gospel writers to tell us about these sufferings of the Lord Jesus in anticipation. It gives us a very blessed insight into the feelings of divine Persons. The account of the crucifixion in each of the gospels is brief; so we have to go to the Old Testament, to the offerings, to fill out what it meant. But here we get an insight into the feelings of the Lord Jesus and of the Father too.

RB It is to have an effect on our own spirits so that these feelings should be reproduced in us, although clearly there is what is unique to the Lord Jesus. He entered into this in a way that we could never do because only He could perfectly measure what sin had brought in, what was involved in taking it away, and He knew, speaking carefully, what the taking away of sin would involve. We can be sobered in reflecting what it was to Him: that should weigh with us.

JAB Yes. Another New Testament scripture that opens up a little of the Lord's feelings in relation to what was before Him is John 12, when He says to the Father, “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But on account of this have I come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name. There came therefore a voice out of heaven, I both have glorified and will glorify it again”, v 27, 28. There was no voice out of heaven here, and yet, despite the Lord's anticipation of the awfulness of what would happen to Him on the cross, His obedience to the Father was unchanged: “not what I will, but what *thou wilt*”.

RB It is affecting to see the Lord Jesus sustained in prayer in regard to that, each time He prays. He prays here as the dependent Man in circumstances facing something that no other man had ever faced before but He faced this with His Father. The forsaking by God lay ahead, but the Lord goes through this in communion - as a dependent Man.

JAB And that communion was unbroken all through His suffering at the hands of men, right to the point at which He was forsaken, after He had been on the cross for three hours. It is wonderful to think of what the Father was to Him until that awful time.

RB Again to refer to the line of Hymn 330:

Great the cost to Thee, blest Father.

As the Lord went through this and prayed and was feeling what was bearing on His spirit, it was shared with His Father. The cost to the Father would come out, but so too does the pleasure of the Father. This expression "Abba, Father" shows the closeness of affection which was maintained all through this.

PAG Does this help us in our understanding of what the offerings actually mean as types? They are there as instruction for us, but this is the reality of the matter. One aspect of the burnt-offering was its inwards, Lev 1: 9. I know the thought of the burnt-offering goes on to death itself but the inwards are before us here, and we can see that the burnt-offering is exclusively for God. There was something even in this time of suffering that was exclusively for God. And then the oblation: one of its features is what was baked in the oven, chap 2: 4. It is the most refined of the references to the oblation; it speaks of inward pressure. And then there is no leaven - nothing to minister to the will of man: "not what I will", the Lord says - and there is no honey, nothing to minister to the comfort of man, v 11. This cup was taken in full; it was not mitigated. These aspects of the offerings come out in their present reality as the Lord suffers.

RB That is very instructive and helpful. There is so much compressed into this section, so many scriptures would bear on it, both in terms of what you have said and the expressions in the Psalms and elsewhere. The type of the oblation baked in the oven is particularly precious here. It was something that only God could take account of, in that sense. It was not a public matter; it was confined and almost condensed.

PAG The word that is sometimes used in ministry in relation to these sufferings is the thought of compression. There is the thought of the winepress and what flows from that, but what you say is right: there is a concentration of suffering that only the Lord Himself could bear. What was for God comes first in what has been said as to the hymn,

Great the cost to Thee, blest Father,

but another of the blessings of the oblation was that the remainder should be for the priests, v 10. There is some aspect of this in which we can participate, which we could not in relation to the atoning sufferings, for example.

RB It is helpful to make that distinction, and the fact that the Lord took these three disciples would itself indicate what you say. There is something to be taken account of, even though they were unable for it; nevertheless the Lord had something in mind in that, as He does for us.

AMB It all brings out the perfection of the Servant. God had that in mind in giving instruction as to the offerings, and really the perfection of the Servant was being put to the test, but was also being demonstrated fully. The Lord was tested in every way, and so it was the flawless One who went to the cross having been tested. What happened here exposes man. The disciples were exposed, but the Lord was perfect in it all. Nor does He avoid it. He was seen in complete obedience to the Father's will; it is perfection in obedience.

RB That is fine. The Lord did not seek to do anything except to move forward in accordance with the will of the Father. We must understand that in relation to what it says in verse 36; He was not trying to avoid what the Father's will entailed but really submitting Himself in the perfection of His manhood.

AMB Yes; it would not have been perfect manhood if He had not said this, if He had not "prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him", and then, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee: take away this cup from me". That was uttered by a perfect Man who felt so keenly what was about to come upon Him, and then He adds, "but not what I will, but what *thou* wilt".

RB In the holiness of His manhood He shrank from what the will of God necessarily entailed. The matter of sin is something that He recoiled from. And that itself further emphasises His perfection in moving forward in the way He does.

DEW Why did He pray more than once?

RB It gives us an insight into the perfection of the dependent Man and the need that He felt to pray in this way. It would give us an insight into the pressure that He felt which could only really be addressed to His Father in feeling all the pressure that was upon Him.

PAG Peter and James and John faced the test three times and were unequal to it, and then Peter himself at the end of the chapter faced a test three times and was unequal to it. The Lord faced it three times and He was equal to it in the perfection of His manhood.

RB That is fine; so while we are not able to enter into this to the extent that the Lord Jesus did, is there a sense in which there is a pattern in the way He prays when faced with a matter such as this?

PAG Yes, and it shows that it is possible for at least something of this to be worked out morally in believers. Paul besought three times that certain matters should be removed, and the word he got in the end was, "My grace suffices thee", 2 Cor 12: 9. The Lord besought three times, and really the answer was that the Father's will was sufficient for Him. He did not need anything else.

RB As a result of praying three times and proving the Father in it, He could move out of Gethsemane in peace; the matter was concluded in that sense. The actuality awaited Him, but really the conflict and the battle had been won.

DS There is great instruction in this for us as to what was said about Peter, James and John going with Him. The Lord speaks as to grief in verse 34: "My soul is full of grief even unto death; abide here and watch". And later on He says to Peter, "Watch and pray". He was the only One who was able to take this matter on. There was something of the great Servant, something we are to understand of His commitment to the will of the Father. We need to take account of the greatness of the sufferings of the Lord in His spirit. The Lord was a real Man and He felt sin like none other.

RB The Lord was and is a real Man and He faced these trials as a Man. He did not, speaking carefully and reverently, rely upon His divinity or who He was as God to mitigate anything that the will of the Father entailed. It was all borne as a Man in perfection, with all the weight that that involved, and yet it is touching that He does go back to the disciples. It is not that He brings them into Gethsemane and leave them, speaking carefully, and go through with the oppression in spirit. He comes back twice to speak to them and lay something on their spirits of what this would entail.

DS It goes on later, “the Son of man is delivered up into the hands of sinners”. The Son of man is the Lord on man's side; so although He is going through it like none other, He is instructing us that we should commit ourselves in this manner. If we seek to do it as true servants and commit it into the hands of our God and Father, He is able to guide and keep us.

RB That is fine; so, in taking up this book, the exercise was to see the Lord as the perfect Servant and to see what He has in mind for those of us who seek to follow in His steps. Peter and James and John were very privileged but very challenged too. They were there at the raising of the damsel (chap 5: 41); they were there at the mount of transfiguration (chap 9: 2); and they are here in Gethsemane. Think of what these experiences involved by way of instruction and learning and what has come down to us as opened out to them in these settings. But here there is something very deep to be learned. The suggestion from Peter's epistle is that he learned it. The challenge would be what do I know of this, and what can I not just say about it, but what can I enter into of what the sorrow and suffering of the Lord Jesus involved?

AMB We have referred to the eating of the offerings. This is the portion of believers as priests. We need to eat that as taking it in and making the blessed perfections of the Lord part of ourselves; that is contemplation. As eating, we would take it into our inwards; that is to affect us.

RB Yes. There is something that will never be formed in a believer unless this is gone through prayerfully and contemplatively. You referred this morning in thanksgiving to worshipping “in spirit and truth”, John 4: 24. What Paul says about the moral teaching that we find in verses like these cannot be taken on and reproduced without entering in some way into the depth of exercise that this involved for the Lord.

AMB Yes. It relates to what is inward. We can “Have an outline of sound words” (2 Tim 1: 13), and we would be helped to see what is actually happening in this chapter and what the Lord was suffering, but the formation is the result of what is inward. It is dwelling on the perfection of that blessed Man, His perfection being proved. The Lord made sure that the three disciples were there; it was a test for them that they could not pass, but they were affected by it. The benefit came out no doubt in the early church and is available to us.

JAB I was thinking about how we should apply this morally to ourselves. When the Lord was tested in the wilderness at the

beginning of His pathway, the devil could not succeed; “the devil, having completed every temptation, departed from him for a time”, Luke 4: 13. It has often been said that this testing in Gethsemane was the end of that season; this was the enemy coming back. Satan tried at the beginning of the Lord's public service, and here at the end of it, to deflect Him from the pathway of obedience to His Father. The enemy tries to do that with us too, although the significance of what is recorded here is unique, but the principle is the same. Is that one way we have to learn from this? If we are committed to the Lord Jesus, to learning more of the Father's thoughts and to the testimony, the enemy will try to divert us. Here we see how obedience is the answer to the enemy's attempts to divert us, for he will always do it. We might not realise he is doing it, but it is a great comfort to see that we have in our Lord Jesus One who can help us not to be diverted because He has gone through it.

RB The way He faced this was in obedience and dependence and prayer; so we are not without resource when we are tempted. Often I fail to make use of the resource which is available, but the Lord Jesus never failed, never could fail.

AMW These feelings of the Lord would be looked on by man as weakness. “He began to be amazed and oppressed in spirit”: note ‘f’ says, ‘or ‘deeply depressed”. Some of these things are looked on as weakness in men's eyes, but does this bring out what we have been saying about the perfection of the Lord, and how He felt these things. It was His love for His Father that kept Him in this pathway of dependence, do you think?

RB We referred in an earlier reading to Isaiah 42, “Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth!”, v 1. There is a sense in which the Servant is being upheld here and the Father's choice justified and vindicated. We need to be affected by this and also affected by what the Father found in the perfection of the Lord Jesus. Everything that He looked for in man was found in Him. Things that no other man could express or even feel were felt perfectly by Christ as God Himself would feel them. I have had an impression of the pleasure that that would afford to heaven and to the Father.

AMW Someone referred in thanksgiving to the pleasure the Lord Jesus brought to the Father, Chief to His heart. He should be Chief to our hearts!

RB What you say is affecting. The Lord was “amazed and oppressed in spirit” but, having faced this matter in the way that He did,

He said, "It is enough; the hour is come". The matter is completed: there was no sense that the enormity of what He was undertaking hindered Him in His forward steps and all that the Father's will involved.

IS I am affected by what is being said. "Arise, let us go": there is a conclusion to this matter which is wonderful to see. I was thinking that in Luke's gospel, there was an angel strengthening Him when He was in conflict, chap 22: 43, 44. We have here, "Arise, let us go". There is a conclusion; He found strength in His God and Father; there is no more conflict of this kind.

RB That is very good. You think of the terrible things that transpired in the next section in relation to Judas, and how the Lord felt that as a Man, but He faced that in the full assurance that the matter was concluded. As you say, "Arise, let us go"; He was always ready for what awaited Him but as having felt this and gone through it in perfection, there is a readiness to move forward in the will of His Father.

JAB Would it be right to think in the light of what has been said that the Lord in His majesty was in control: "Arise, let us go"? The next section shows a very different scene: "they led away Jesus to the high priest". It says elsewhere that they bound Him (chap 15: 1), and they bound a crown of thorns on Him, v 17. He was still in control, because it was the Father's will that He should be taken by wicked hands, but we have to look beneath the surface to see the glory of Christ submitting to what these men with their swords and sticks were doing, and all that happened there. He was going on in His pathway of obedience; His enemies just did not realise it.

RB "They led away Jesus": that involved the Lord's submission to what the hands of men were going to mete out. In another gospel when they came forward, He said, "I am he" and "they went away backward and fell to the ground" (John 18: 6), but we do not get that here. The perfection of the Servant, in that sense, seems to predominate in this gospel.

JAB You can see that in this section. We can go to the Old Testament and see what the Lord felt about it. He speaks prophetically about "mine own familiar friend", Ps 41: 9. He speaks about the pains of betrayal; these were all felt by the Lord Jesus. It is not spoken of here; so we need to bring Old Testament scriptures into this.

RB There is a very affecting section,

For it is not an enemy that hath reproached me - then could I

have borne it... But it was thou, a man mine equal, mine intimate, my familiar friend ..., Ps 55: 12, 13.

How the Lord felt that it was one, as the Scripture goes on to say, with whom He had enjoyed things in His pathway here that delivered Him up. What an intensity of suffering that would involve, but nothing compared to what He had gone through in Gethsemane.

DS The Lord speaks here in relation to His Person. That impression comes out in some of the other gospels. It says elsewhere, “he answered him not so much as one word”, Matt 27: 14. In this gospel it says, “But he was silent, and answered nothing”, but then later on it says, “Again the high priest asked him, and says to him, *Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, “*I* am”. The other gospels likewise speak of Him being silent and opening not His mouth bringing out who He is in His Person.

RB There is something that needed to be answered here, and the Lord makes this statement.

AMB In Matthew it is the word of adjuration. “And the high priest answering said to him, I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us if *thou* art the Christ the Son of God. Jesus says to him, *Thou* hast said”, Matt 26: 63, 64. I think what the high priest says here, “*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the Blessed” is an adjuration, and He answered truthfully. What a testimony was presented in the face of such malice and hatred, a testimony to the truth; there was no denying it. It brings out the hatred of the Jewish system. Jesus does not defend Himself, He does not seek mitigation, and He does not offer any response to the accusations. He confirms what was the truth as to Himself.

DS That is very helpful. If the truth of who He is was challenged, He answered; but against these false accusations, He remains silent. Speaking of Him prophetically, Isaiah says, “he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and was as a sheep dumb before her shearers, and he opened not his mouth”, chap 53: 7.

AW We have already referred to Luke: “an angel appeared to him from heaven strengthening him” (chap 22: 43), but I wondered if each one of us needs to see the strength and power in the Person of the Lord here over against the weakness of man. They were not able to sustain their watching, and then later on Peter fails. I think it emphasises the power and strength of the Lord Himself.

RB A great crowd came to take Him “with swords and sticks”.

These were expressions of man's power, but nothing availed against the Lord's glory. The Lord Jesus as here in manhood healed the bondman of the high priest as we know from another gospel (Luke 22: 51) and here He says, "Are ye come out as against a robber, with swords and sticks to take me?". You see the futility of man's mind and how the Lord Jesus was in control even in answering them in this way.

PAG We mentioned the temptations at the beginning of the Lord's path of service. Do you think that in these, God received testimony that His Servant is perfect, but in this setting the enemy's attack brings out the public testimony that God's Servant is perfect?

RB Yes, even though there is apparently nobody responding to that public demonstration of the perfection of Christ, there is a sense in which God is justified even in that.

PAG Yes. In the temptations, we have been taught that He was tested as Man, as Son of man, and as Son of God. That all comes in here. As Man, He is before His Father, "but not what I will, but what *thou* wilt". But then it is the Son of man being delivered up into the hands of sinners. He goes that way on our behalf. And then He could have avoided suffering by not accepting or not linking on with what the high priest said, "*Thou* art the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?". His place as Son of God brought Him suffering, but He did not avoid it. He accepted it all, and God was justified. There was nobody responding to Him then, but we are responding to Him now. The blessing of this testimony is that it has lasted for two thousand years.

RB That is fine and has given tone in that sense to the present testimony which is all centred in this blessed and glorious Man.

Linlithgow

12th September 2021

List of initials (all local unless shown otherwise):-

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JESUS CRUCIFIED

Mark 15

JAB We see in this chapter that the suffering and opposition that the Lord Jesus had to bear when He was here was not only from the Jews. We spoke in the reading last week about the Lord Jesus in the high priest's palace, but now we see Him brought before what is political in Pilate and his military system. This is to remind us that, when the Lord Jesus was here, apart from those who through God's sovereign mercy responded to His contact with them, He was rejected on every hand. The world system was against Him, the religious, the political world, and the crowd too. It is sobering.

AMB You just feel that: the chapter gives us man in his wilfulness and opposition. Man in his responsibility is exposed. That would agree with what is indicated by the name of the place, Golgotha, the place of a skull. In condemning the Lord in opposition and refusal and cruelty, man proved utterly lacking in any appreciation of Him, but there is one Man in perfection in the midst of it.

JAB He suffered because He loved. He went this way because He loved the will of God, and He loved those whom He was to secure. These sufferings that we spoke about last week in Gethsemane showed how much He suffered there in anticipating His death, and what He suffered in opposition from the Jews; and then what we have in this chapter were all sufferings of a particular kind of which it would be true to say - although I find it very challenging to say it - we can have some experience, not of what was anticipatory on the part of Jesus, but as facing something of the opposition against Him. But it is important to see that, from verse 33, we come to those sufferings into which no one could enter, because they were His alone. Is that what you had in mind in the hymn you gave out as to the cross? What Jesus suffered from the sixth hour to the ninth hour was distinctively different from all the other aspects of Jesus' sufferings.

PAG Yes, we are told that peace has been made "by the blood of His cross", Col 1: 20. Elsewhere and rightly, the cross is referred to in a more general way; but do you think "His cross" shows the distinctiveness of the sufferings that you are speaking of? There were persons on other crosses, but this was "His cross". We deserved to be there; but He did what no one else ever could do.

JAB As to all these sufferings up to verse 32, He bore them - not *for*

us exactly, because our sins were not dealt with then; but He bore them to show His perfection, did He not? I would be glad of help as to the bearing of the first part of the chapter, and then the distinctiveness of verses 33 and 34, which cover so much.

AMW All these things that you mention were part of His sufferings. Speaking carefully, there was what Jesus bore from a righteous God which is beyond us, but you are also bringing out persons' attitude towards the Lord, their disbelief and the hatred that was shown towards the Lord Jesus.

JAB Yes. As believers, what we have to understand is that the attitude of men towards Christ then, and which hurt Him so much, is still the same. These sufferings would help us in the world through which we have to pass, to take Christ's side. They should have an impact on our affections, as we think of Him doing all this in love for His God and Father and for us. But there is also the moral challenge, as to whether I actually see that the character of the world is still the same as it was then.

AMW Yes, and as we prove it, we should feel some of those sufferings ourselves, should we not?

JAB Every time the Lord's name is used as a swear word, it hurts us; that would be one simple example.

ABB Are these first verses part of what Paul speaks of to Timothy as to "the good confession", 1 Tim 6: 13? We see the Lord Jesus in this time of great pressure, and He says one thing: "*Thou sayest*". He is true to what He was in spite of the opposition; and then there is what He said as to being a king. Was the Lord's confession unique to Him, but can we align ourselves with what the Lord was and is?

JAB You had in mind that "the good confession" involves more than what is said?

AMB Jesus witnessed before Pilate "the good confession". With the Lord there was in Him and with Him what was absolutely true; He bore witness to the truth. When it came to His own defence, He was silent, but when it was anything concerning the truth of God, He bore witness to that. There is divine perfection in this Man at every turn.

ABB That is good. His perfection shines out; you see the Lord's moral glories shine out. It has been described as perfect goodness in the midst of all evil. We see that here: they tried to catch Him in His

words. You get the sense that Pilate was not willing to damage his own position, although he sought to free the Lord. You see the weakness of the institution. Pilate sought to maintain his reputation, but here was a Man who “made Himself of no reputation”, Phil 2: 7 KJV.

AMB The Lord's moral glory, perfection in the midst of such evil, also brings out the failure of every other kind of man, including ourselves, does it not? We have to accept that deeply.

CAS There seems to be an urgency here on behalf of the enemy. The chapter begins “immediately”; and then in verse 3 the chief priests accused Him urgently, and then in verse 14, the crowd “cried out the more urgently”. Is it a sign of the whole power of the enemy concentrated against the Lord?

AMB I think that is right. We have been impressed by how every factor in this scene is energised and stirred up by the enemy in opposition to Christ. Do you think that gives us a view of what the enemy thinks of Christ, and what Christ had to go through in this scene? What we are contemplating in this chapter here are the 'waves and billows' that hymn 435 speaks of. Everything that could be opposed to Him was against the Lord - even the denial by His own disciple, and the betrayal by Judas. It was all energised by the enemy against the Lord. No other man could possibly stand against it, but Jesus did.

CAS So He becomes a wonderful contemplation for the heart; He “answered nothing”.

AMB We would have answered back, or tried to; He answered nothing in His defence.

AB As to the urgency and the pressure that we spoke of, from verse 12 to verse 29, every verse starts with the word “And”. It is like a cumulation in every verse; they were terrible things and yet the Lord bore them all. We referred to the Lord's changeless love this morning. You see that here in every verse - “And” - yet He bore it all.

AMB It should always affect us that, in the greatest testing of the Lord which we see in this chapter and in chapter 14, He remains absolutely perfect. It is His perfection that really shines out in the pressure. Every person and every institution against Him, including those who should have been for Him, as Mr Darby says in *The Man of Sorrows* -

Priests who should plead for weakness
Must Thine accusers be.

The people to whom He was the true Messiah, and He showed Himself to them as such, were baying for His life, and yet He went through in patience. Pilate is so exposed; there was something in him that took account of the Lord, for he says, "What evil then has he done?". That is all swept up in this time which the enemy was directing. It is a very sober matter to see what the enemy tries to do against Christ. He did that here and he was defeated, but he has not given up, he still works against Christ and those who are loyal to Him. It is a sober matter to be aware of.

PAG Satan's opposition is constant and unrelenting, and he knows nothing else. It says in the Old Testament, "the hand is on the throne of Jah", Exod 17: 16. He would overthrow the throne if he could; and in the urgency we have spoken of here - Satan saw what he believed to be an advantage, and he pressed it home as hard as he could. And yet, at the end of it all, the centurion said, "Truly this man was Son of God". The enemy outwardly had an advantage; but in the souls of those that appreciated Him, there was only one Victor.

AMB It is good to see that we get the confession of the gentile centurion, and also the emergence of faithfulness in Joseph and the women - Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James the less and Joses, and Salome. There was faithfulness brought to light; so the enemy did not gain the victory, neither over Christ nor over those who loved Him.

PAG Nonetheless, at this time we have at least some insight into what is meant when it says in Leviticus, "an offering by fire"; the relentless nature of it, and the destructive nature of it. But Christ was the only offering who could go through the fire.

AMB Yes, and the fire, speaking of the pressure of the suffering, brought out the odour that was supremely sweet to the Father.

PAG Yes, there was immeasurable sweetness for the Father in a perfect Man; but there was no sweetness for Christ. It says in relation to the oblation that there was to be no leaven and no honey, Lev 2: 11. There was nothing to minister to His comfort, nothing to sweeten the blow; all was darkness.

AMB There was no alleviation of any kind. Those who come to light, the centurion and Joseph, did so after the Lord had suffered and given up His spirit.

JAB Why is it that we are told so much of the Lord's anticipatory sufferings, and His sufferings from the hands of man, and so little in the narrative - two verses - about what He suffered as made sin? I know that the apostles expand greatly on what these two verses refer to, but why is this account so short? Is there something to learn from that?

PAG In one sense, these two verses are the most we could know. We could not really know the depths of the Lord's feelings, although we can take account of the fact that they were there. For example, it says in Psalm 41: 8, "A thing of Belial cleaveth fast unto him". There was something so awful that all the writer of the psalm could do was to describe it as a "thing". It could not really be described, it was so awful, so dreadful. I think the fact that the account here is short is, in a sense, meant to arrest us. This is the culmination of three hours. If you think of the compression of the three hours, every sin was accounted for - those which had taken place, and those that would take place - and they were accounted for individually, named and dealt with, and the penalty fell on Christ in these three hours.

JAB That brings in what we spoke of a little last week about compression. Who can look into it? We speak of compression; it brings home a sense by the Holy Spirit of all that was done then. There is that which man cannot really look into. It was between Jesus and His God.

PAG I think it brings out what you were mentioning earlier: the first part of the chapter up to verse 32 we sometimes refer to as suffering for righteousness, and we can enter into that, but this is suffering for sin and we cannot enter into it. If you or I suffered for sin we would die; that is what would happen to us. There would be no period of time for which we would survive.

JAB That is very helpful, and very sobering too. And yet it is very blessed, because Jesus was able to bear it. And He went there in love.

AMB It is really the valley of Achor as "a door of hope" (Hos 2: 15) that we were speaking about the other night.

AVW There are many titles mentioned here. Jesus is spoken of mockingly as the King of the Jews and the King of Israel, but there is only one person that gives Him a genuine recognition, Son of God, and that was a man who was affected in his soul.

JAB The high priest in the previous chapter put it as a question:

“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am, and ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power”. The title involves power, does it not? And the Lord is, as the hymn says, worthy of every crown that decks His brow, Hymn 343. It is very glorious, that in relation to every title that the Lord has, He is absolutely deserving of every one of them. Would that be part of it, do you think?

AVW Yes. There will come a time when men will look on Him as their King, and have to acknowledge Jesus rightly, but I thought of this man here. He had seen many crucifixions, no doubt, but he says, “Truly this man was Son of God”. There must have been something in that man's soul to say that.

JAB What you say is good. These Jews, the chief priests, mocking with one another, said, “Let the Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross”. The Jewish nation never saw Him again: the next time they see Him, He will be “Christ the King of Israel” and they will have to acknowledge Him, and we know that they will. That will be different to what is described in these chapters.

ABB The end of verse 31 is affecting: “himself he cannot save”. It is another thing that was said in mockery, but how thankful we are to the One who did not save Himself. We know from another gospel that there were legions of angels, who were no doubt looking on at this time, and what temerity it was on the part of man to do this to the Saviour. It is almost a title we can take up as to Jesus: “himself he cannot save”. The hymn says -

Love's stream too deeply flowed (Hymn 240).

JAB And that is totally foreign to the natural man. I have often spoken about a Jewish businessman on a ship with a brother who preached the gospel to him, and he rejected it, saying, 'I do not want a God who can die!'. It was in dying that Jesus won the victory. The hymn says,

Through weakness and defeat
He won the mead and crown (Hymn 24).

ABB That is good. There is another hymn we sing at the Supper that refers to Jesus' love

... that, giving all, secures
The universe for God (hymn 171).

That is what the Lord Jesus was doing in these sobering verses 33 and 34. God was dishonoured by sin; He felt it so deeply. We read in the Old Testament that He repented that He had made man, Gen 6: 6. It was at this darkest spot that Jesus was glorifying God in relation to sin. I was thinking of what was said earlier as to the offerings. Although there was great darkness, there was a basis provided for absolutely everything for our blessing; but more importantly, for God's pleasure eternally, all through this one Man and what He did then.

JAB Yes, that is right. That would be why Mr Darby wrote that the cross is the centre of eternity (Synopsis on John's Gospel, p361). It is the focal point of everything. For those who reject Him, it is the focal point of their rejection, but for all those who accept Him, and thank God there are millions and millions of them, all that is and will be for God in praise eternally is based on this one sacrifice.

PAG We can understand the comment that Paul makes to Corinth, that "the cross is to them that perish foolishness", 1 Cor 1: 18. The Lord on the cross did things that men would not do, and also that men could not do. We might say that without the incarnation there would be no salvation, but without the death of Christ there would be no salvation. The scripture says, "becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of the cross", Phil 2: 8. It was obedience to His Father's will that took Him there to death; but the Father's will, the will of God, involved the death of the cross. It had to be such a death in order to redeem us out of the curse of the law.

JAB And that had been ordained from eternity; it was not just a reaction to what man turned out to be, was it? God had all of this in His mind from before time, and Christ did all this for God and for man.

CAS It is good to have that side, what is in the purpose of God. Peter speaks of it: "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God". So we have God's side, running alongside "ye, by the hand of lawless men, have crucified and slain", Acts 2: 23.

JAB The Romans thought they were in control here, but God was in control. And that helps to stabilise us if we experience opposition or difficulty of any kind: we know that nothing is outside of the purpose of God. You might ask, 'How could it be that God would plan that His beloved Son should suffer in this way?', but there was a reason for it.

CAS We have that scripture in Isaiah 53, "it pleased Jehovah to bruise him", v 10. We cannot go deeper than that, it is something to

contemplate.

AMB It was for us. We can hold on to that in our souls, that these sufferings at the hand of God were for us. And then His sufferings at the hands of man exposed what man is, and what we are according to nature. There is a tremendous depth in the whole chapter. I do not think of it enough, but if I had been there, I would have been with the crowd, or certainly capable of being with the crowd. That is a very important thing for us as believers to come to, that in us naturally there is no love for Christ, no admiration or respect for Him. We have to come by way of judging ourselves in the light of this scene as it is presented.

CAS According to what we are naturally, we would be the same.

AMB Exactly.

PAG Do you think it would help us to see - and this chapter brings it out distinctly - that there is no overlap between what man is after the flesh and what God is. We have that expression, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all", 1 John 1: 5. Why introduce the second point? The first is clear enough, but the fact is there is no part in what man is in the flesh that finds its place in what God does.

AMB Yes, you can see the total opposition to Christ morally, all motivated by the enemy; and that is what we are as away from God, susceptible to the promptings of the enemy in opposition to Christ. None of us wants to be like that.

DEW I was thinking about what God would be feeling here, and you marvel at the continuing love of God towards us. What you just brought in is helpful - that there is no overlap at all between us according to nature and God. It was said in a reading relatively recently that God does not look at us in that way at all; He looks at us as sons, does He not? For those who trust in the Lord Jesus, we are looked at as sons straightaway. It makes you wonder.

PAG That is absolutely right. We have spoken of the purpose of God, and part of that is "that we should be holy and blameless before him in love", Eph 1: 4. These last two words are really important, "in love". The love of God may not be on the surface of this chapter, but it is lying behind it right from beginning to end.

AB I was thinking that. These are sober chapters and yet it is still love: "where sin abounded grace has overabounded", Rom 5: 20. Grace would speak of love.

PAG Yes, grace is love acting in adverse circumstances.

AB We see that here.

ABB Can you say why the original language that the Lord Jesus used at this moment, while under the pressure that we have spoken of, is included here in verse 24? It is quite unusual that we have the original Aramaic, the actual words that the Lord Jesus used in speaking to His Father when communion for this moment had been broken. It is no doubt calculated to further affect our hearts.

PAG We get one or two instances of it, but not many. Jesus came to the man that was dumb, and He said, "Ephphatha, that is, Be opened", Mark 7: 34. I think it is intended to express the depth of His feelings. We also get the partly translated expression, "Abba, Father" in the previous chapter. Although we cannot enter into these things, I think the Holy Spirit would, as it were, bring us as near as we can come. These words were heard by those who were around the cross. We would have been just like those haters and opposers, but we have the privilege of knowing what the Lord actually said: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?". And furthermore, we know the answer.

ABB Each one of us needs to answer this question. The Lord Jesus was forsaken because of the things I have done and what I am. It was quoted recently, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil", Hab 1: 13. And the hymn says, "Truly alone!", Hymn 268. As has been said, this is a moral question for each of us.

PAG One thing to be clear about is that Jesus was forsaken because He was made sin. He "bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet 2: 24), that is one aspect of His sufferings, and He was made sin. He was made the very thing itself, and it was on that account that the forsaking came in in all its reality. Jesus was made the thing that God could not look upon.

ABB "That we might become God's righteousness in him", 2 Cor 5: 21. The point that you have made is helpful.

CAS So the Lord uttered a loud cry in verse 37. He exhausted God's judgment and made a way out. There was never a death like it. The centurion would never have seen a death like this.

PAG Yes, the powers of men fade as they near their death. The Lord was still fully in control of the matter at this point, distinct in every way.

CAS He had authority; He said, "I have authority to lay down my life", John 10: 18. Because of His perfection, He was not subject to death but He went into it vicariously.

AMB It was His own act; and then He spoke about His taking His life again: "I have received this commandment of my Father", all part of the deep perfection of this One.

What do we say about the veil of the temple rent from the top to the bottom; "rent in two" - completely separate - "from the top to the bottom"? It was the end of the whole Jewish system, that God might come out on the basis of what Christ had done. And also, I suppose, there was a way into that presence.

JAB In the law, nobody but the high priest, once a year, had a right to go in where the ark was inside the veil. I was thinking of the significance of this opening up. It has often been said that God coming out in grace is symbolised by the rent veil, and we can go into the holy of holies by virtue of the blood of Jesus; there is a way in for us.

AMB And it involves the revelation, the making known of God as Father, the making known of His feelings towards the race, and the way in which those of us who believe in Christ can go in; it is all in Jesus, this One who is presented as the suffering One here, who has made God known and opened the way in for us.

AVW Would it be right to say that in what you have referred to as the veil being rent, there would be the side of testimony? We were speaking about what the Lord could do, and I wondered if there was a testimony here. Earlier on the Lord said nothing, and there was a testimony in that; but I wondered here whether it was a testimony to man? And then we get the centurion: he did not say what he did secretly, but it says that he cried out. And then Joseph goes to Pilate. He might have thought twice about going to Pilate in view of what he had done, but I wondered if there are various instances here of a testimony that shines out towards man.

AMB The blessedness of what Christ has accomplished has a testimony borne to it. The testimony of the rent veil would be particularly to the Jews, something that had never happened before. What happened in the rending of the veil bore testimony to the One of whom they said, "He saved others; himself he cannot save". Something new was being introduced on an entirely new foundation, a new basis; a Man went into death in power.

DEW Was it at this point that what we call the dispensation of grace started?

AMB Yes, I think so; the Lord's death gave God the basis to bless. It was the ending of what was Jewish. In the actual working out of it, there was what you might call a provisional time at the very beginning, but I think you are right that the dispensation of grace began here. There was not another dispensation between. We get an impression of how completely the whole scene was changed by Christ going into death as He did.

PAG Would that be borne out by the fact that it says in Romans 3 as to Christ, "whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood", v 25. We know that the ark was not literally behind the veil at this time, but one aspect of the rending of the veil, in the teaching of it, was that the ark was behind the veil; and the rending meant that the mercy-seat could be set forth.

AMB How God rejoiced to set Jesus forth as a Mercy-seat. The temple system was a shadow of things to come; these physical artefacts in the Jewish system were shadows of what was to come. But here was the One who was the Man who accomplished everything for God.

PAG Would you say too that the fact that the veil was rent from the top was a demonstration that heaven had remained in control?

AMB I am sure that is right, and it starts to show, in the testimony of the centurion and in the actions of the women and Joseph, that love triumphs.

Linlithgow

19th September 2021

List of initials (all local unless shown otherwise):-

Alan Brown; Alistair M Brown; A Barrie Brown; J A Brown; P A Gray;
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INCREASING APPRECIATION OF CHRIST

Paul A Gray

Romans 5: 19-21

Ecclesiastes 7: 28 (“one man ...found”)

Song of Songs 5: 10

Revelation 5: 11-14

You will notice that in the first scripture that we have read we have one, and in the second we have a thousand, and in the third we have ten thousand, and in the fourth we have ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands. What I want to speak about is an increasing appreciation of Christ; that is what is in mind, an increasing appreciation of the Lord Jesus. I can assure you, that however much our appreciation of Him increases, we will never exhaust His glory. You will remember that in Genesis 37, Jacob made Joseph a vest of many colours (sometimes called a coat of many colours), v 3. The scripture does not tell us how many colours there were. I think that is because they were innumerable. You could not really say how many there were, because every time you looked you would get a fresh impression of the vest of many colours. For example, if you look at the offerings in Leviticus from chapter 1 through to the laws of the offerings in chapter 7 you get different impressions corresponding to the vest of many colours, different aspects of the offering: the burnt offering, the oblation, the peace offering, the sin offering, the trespass offering, each bringing out some aspect of Christ: His excellence in the sight of God in the burnt offering, the perfection of His manhood in the oblation, the blessedness of His power to maintain right relations among brethren in the peace offering, the work that He did in righteousness on the cross in the sin offering, and then the maintenance of the rights of God in the trespass offering. It is interesting that the trespass offering is the one where you have a fifth part added, indicating that in every exercise there is something added for God as Christ is taken account of.

Now these are five aspects of the Lord's moral worth drawn from the offerings, and there could be many more; everyone listening to this preaching will have some impression of the Lord Jesus, and as we share them we can add to them. I do not think even eternity itself will exhaust the vest of many colours. It is good simply to look at the Lord Jesus and to take account of His glory, because we all need Him as a Saviour. That is why I began where I did, because we have to start with

One; "by the disobedience of the one man", that was Adam, "the many have been constituted sinners, so also by the obedience of the one", and then it does not even say, 'by the one man'; it just says, "by the obedience of the one", because there could not be anybody else but Jesus, there is no other name "by which we must be saved", Acts 4: 12. That obedience involved His coming into manhood; it says, "he learned obedience from the things which he suffered", Heb 5: 8. He came into a condition to which obedience attached. He did not learn obedience, as we do, in part as a consequence of disobedience; He learned obedience in perfection because He came into a condition to which obedience applied; He was obedient to the will of His God and Father. Even to the extent of taking the cup, He says, "Father, if thou wilt remove this cup from me:- but then, not my will, but thine be done" Luke 22: 42. And that cup involved not only the suffering at the hands of man for righteousness, but it involved suffering from God, it involved the forsaking, it involved that He was "made sin for us"(2 Cor 5: 21), it involved His death and the shedding of His blood and His going into the grave, and it meant that He would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. He is spoken of in Ephesians 4: 10 as "He that descended", and how far He descended! He descended in love from glory to this earth, but He descended in love from the cross to the grave, and He did it for God, and He did it for you and for me. And now He is out of it in triumph and glory; such is the fruit of the obedience of the One!

You have to come in obedience to Him; you have to repent; it says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved", Acts 16: 31. It requires obedience; God looks for obedience in our hearts, and we find that by faith, and God gives us faith, and He gives us repentance. Everything that God requires in His righteousness He gives in His grace. He does not ask you to do something you cannot do; it says, "without faith it is impossible to please him", Heb 11: 6. Who gives us faith? God gives us faith! God "enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent", Acts 17: 30. Who gives us repentance? God grants us repentance! How great the grace of God is, so that Paul can say, "where sin abounded grace has overabounded". Sin abounded at the cross! There were persons around the Lord, some abusive, some indifferent, and a few true to His name, but sin abounded, and there was mocking and sneering. The writer Bernard of Clairvaux who wrote the lines,

Jesus! the very thought of Thee

With sweetness fills the breast; (Hymn 279)

used to have at least one more hymn attributed to him in the Little Flock hymnbook:

Thy head once full of bruises,
 So full of pain and scorn
Mid other sore abuses,
 Mocked with a crown of thorn.

This is the blessed One who went to the cross, and that same hymn in a further verse said,

O Lord! what Thee tormented,
 Was our sins' heavy load,
We had the debt augmented,
 Which Thou didst pay in blood.

Believers were chosen individually in Christ before the foundation of the world, but also He bore our sins individually: "who himself bore our sins in his body on the tree", 1 Pet 2: 24. He did not bear the sins of the human race in a mass; believers know that He bore every single one. They were accounted for there, in the three hours of darkness on the cross that God's righteousness might be satisfied, His holy claims of justice met, and that sinners might draw near to God, not for rebuke or condemnation but in order that they might be saved! And Jesus did that in His obedience. He went that way, "by the obedience of the one the many will be constituted righteous". You are reckoned righteous in chapter 4: that is by faith. You are constituted righteous in chapter 5, because in chapter 5 the gift of the Spirit comes in. So we are reckoned righteous by faith, and constituted righteous as believers having the gift of the Spirit. This is all God's provision, "grace has overabounded, in order that, even sin has reigned in the power of death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". We are brought into the sphere of eternal life where we can enjoy things together, and Christ is the centre: "through Jesus Christ our Lord".

What then about this matter of increasing in our appreciation of Him? We must first commit ourselves to Him, but then how does our appreciation grow? There is a little example of that in John the baptist. When He saw Jesus coming to him he says, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", John 1: 29. In that sense we could say when he saw Jesus coming to him, he first saw him in relation to

himself, and he said, 'I need sin taken away'. Now of course the taking away of the sin of the world involves the whole matter including the end, when the devil and his angels are confined to the lake of fire (Rev 20: 10), and the last enemy that is annulled is death (1 Cor 15: 26): then the whole matter is settled, the sin of the world is taken away. But John saw Him first in relation to himself, but then the later impression he has was "looking at Jesus as he walked, he says, Behold the Lamb of God", chap 1: 36. He did not just see Him as He was in relation to himself, He saw Him how He was in relation to God. He had an increased impression of Jesus as He walked.

I read in these various scriptures starting in Ecclesiastes; "one man among a thousand have I found". So first it is one, "one man", and He becomes distinctive to us, but then Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes, had examined, had looked on a thousand men and still there was only one! There was only one! I can remember when I was a child and I was not well, and I was lying on a makeshift bed in the kitchen while my mother did her day's work and she sang to me, as she often did. One of the lines has stayed in my mind for over fifty years:

Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me.

Now that is like "one man among a thousand have I found". I may have looked at all these other persons, but no one but Christ can satisfy. And we have to come to that, there is no satisfaction to be found anywhere else. Years later, I remember a brother preaching and quoting from the gospel hymn my mother sang,

I tried the broken cisterns, ah!
But how the waters failed;
Even as I stooped to drink they fled,
And mocked me as I wailed

The answer lies in Jesus, as another hymn says,

I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him. (Hymn 248)

That is open to everyone; no one is banished from the presence of God; all are welcome; we say that on our noticeboards, and it is true. They are welcome because of the work that Jesus has done, and however widely, Solomon says, I might cast my net, I can only find one man, "one

man among a thousand have I found”.

Books of scripture such as Ecclesiastes are interesting, even if they are slightly obscure in places; but bear in mind that the Lord says at the end of Luke's gospel, “all that is written concerning me in the law of Moses and the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled”, chap 24: 44. We may think of the “psalms” as referring to one hundred and fifty psalms, but I understand that the books Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs are all included in the expression “the psalms”. They speak of experience with God.

In Job we learn that man's wisdom has to be put out of court. It is like the beginning of Paul's appeal in 1 Corinthians 1, where he says, “the foolishness of God is wiser than men”, v 25. Job's three friends speak to him, they seek to offer words of wisdom, and Job justifies himself, and it all has to go. Elihu, who is younger than Job's friends, speaks at the end and says that Job has justified himself, and Job comes to it that he cannot justify himself. He says to God in chapter 42,

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye
seeth thee: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and
ashes, v 5-6.

He had to come to it through bitter experience that there was nothing good in himself, as Paul the apostle says, “For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell”, Rom 7: 18. The only answer is in Christ. Job had counsellors and comforters, but it all came to nothing. And yet in all of that God spoke to him, there is the point that he says, “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and the Last, he shall stand upon the earth”, chap 19: 25. He knew that there was a Redeemer and indeed he sees the need for “an umpire between us, who should lay his hand upon us both” (chap 9: 33) - that is to say, someone who could be in touch with both God and man. The New Testament speaks of “the mediator of God and men one, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2: 5), the One who can put His hand upon us both.

And Job learns things not only from redemption but also creation. He finds a great beast, the behemoth, who “startleth not: he is confident though a Jordan break forth against his mouth” (chap 40: 23), and that is like a type of Christ. He went into death, the Jordan broke forth against Him, and as the writer says,

What ailed thee, thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that
thou turnedst back?”, Ps 114: 5.

The Lord did not startle at death; He went into it in power and broke its power and came out of it again. Once you have seen that great example, the whole of chapter 41 is devoted to the leviathan, which is a powerful beast. It is said to be king of all proud beasts, and it is a type of Satan, and it cannot be attacked, it cannot be assailed on any side. There is no point in trying to attack Satan: he is the destroyer and he wants to attack you. What you must have in mind is that he is the defeated foe! It says to resist him; it does not say attack him; it says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you", Jam 4: 7. You resist him in the power of the Holy Spirit. And Job came through all these experiences, and God spoke to him. Elihu asked him, "Dost thou know about the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?", Job 37: 16. He says there are good days and there are difficult days, but it is all in God's hands, "the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge". Elihu was the one who also said, "From the north cometh gold", chap 37: 22. He said, in effect, that there are times of trial, and that God will work out His own answer in them. At the end Job comes to it that God has the last word, and man's wisdom is out of court, and he comes to it by experience.

Having come from Job you come into the experiences of the Psalms, and you find there is one Man before God. It is interesting that the Psalms begin with the words, "Blessed is the man". Now, of course, we can say that Psalm 1 may speak of features of Christ formed in the saints, but I think it all starts with Christ, "Blessed is the man". In the second Psalm Jehovah has anointed His King on His holy hill, Zion, and the Man is brought before us, and we learn Him by experience. We learn first His moral greatness, His moral headship: that is what we learn in Romans. Then we learn His personal headship: that is what we learn in Colossians; and then we learn His official headship: that is what we learn in Ephesians, but you see it in the Psalms. Psalm 22 is the moral greatness of Christ, the Good Shepherd who "lays down his life for the sheep", John 10: 11. Psalm 23 is the personal greatness of Christ, the Great Shepherd, whom God brought again from death "in the power of the blood of the eternal covenant" (Heb 13: 20); it says in Psalm 23,

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I
will fear no evil:
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me,
verse 4.

So He is brought out of death in the power of the blood of the eternal covenant, death is conquered, and the personal greatness of Christ comes before us. In Psalm 24 it is His official greatness:

Who is he, this King of glory?, verse 10.

That is the Chief Shepherd! Peter says, “when the chief shepherd is manifested”, 1 Pet 5: 4. The Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd; He is growing in our vision, He is growing in our souls, and we learn through the Psalms what it is to have experience with God. Psalm 72 is for Solomon, and it concludes with,

The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended, verse 20.

After Solomon has come in, in this setting as a type of Christ, there is nothing more for man to say, “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended”. There is much more that could be said, but the end of the Psalms is,

Let everything that hath breath praise Jah.

All these experiences of Christ are intended to bring about increase and response to God.

Having got that one Man before us, in the Proverbs you come to instruction for sons and what is suitable for sonship, and what is available in wisdom; so a son is not to despise the teaching of his mother, chap 1: 8. The son is to be brought up in what is suitable and to understand the basis of wisdom and wisdom's house. What accrues at the end of the Proverbs as a result of that is first of all the recognition of the purpose of God where the writer says, “What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou knowest”, chap 30: 4. And then an appreciation of the assembly, the woman of worth; “The heart of her husband confideth in her”, chap 31: 11. So you can see that there is soul progress as Christ is taken account of and then you come to Ecclesiastes the Preacher, who is the former of assemblies, you come to this point, “one man among a thousand have I found”. He says, “but a woman among all those have I not found”. Why not? Because the answer to Christ lies in the assembly and the assembly alone, that is where it is to be found. The former of assemblies, the preacher, recognises that, there is nothing for Christ in this dispensation but the assembly, “a woman among all those have I not found”. It is not to be found in the world, not in sect or religion; it is to be found in the assembly. It is an important thing to lay hold of for our souls, because as our appreciation of Christ grows our appreciation of what is due to

Him from the assembly would also grow, as would the place that the assembly has in His affections.

I know that the Song of Songs is not properly a full type of the assembly, as union does not enter into it, but nevertheless the Song of Songs has been described as the song of a captured heart. That is what we come to! We come to it that the Lord will see us all the way through. It says in the last chapter of the Song of Songs,

Many waters cannot quench love,
Neither do the floods drown it, chap 8: 7.

I have heard that quoted as neither *did* the floods drown it, and it has been related to the cross. While the reference to the cross is of course understandable, what the scripture says is, “Neither **do** the floods drown it”, and that is right now! John the apostle writes, “To him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father”, Rev 1: 5-6.

So we go from Ecclesiastes, “one man among a thousand”, and come to the Song of Songs, “The chiefest among ten thousand”. Solomon looked even further afield, and still there is no one to compare with Christ, “The chiefest among ten thousand”. He says, “My beloved is white and ruddy”, and what that means is that our appreciation of Christ leads us to understand that He Himself is entirely pure. The Lord is intrinsically pure, and the answer in the assembly is intrinsically pure. What does it mean to be ruddy? It says of David that he was a youth and “he was ruddy, and besides of a lovely countenance”, 1 Sam 16: 12. It means that he had good colour; what it means is that he was alive; there was evidence of life in his face. There is an answer to Christ in the assembly in what is alive; the response of the assembly is living. It is not a dead matter; it is not a matter of formula or rote; it is a living response; she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and energised by divine power, “The chiefest among ten thousand”! However wide she casts her gaze there is none like this One, “The chiefest among ten thousand”!

We come in Revelation to “ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands”. I want to draw your attention to the fact that in Revelation 9 there is also a large number quoted in relation to those who gather as enemies and it says, “twice ten thousand times ten thousand” and John says, “I heard their number”, verse 16. That is the number of the enemies; that might be two hundred million if you work it

out; this in chapter 5 is more than that! This is “ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands”, and he does not say, ‘I heard their number’; in a sense the writer emphasises that the enmity was finite and it was put in its place. In 2 Kings there was a city that was surrounded. Elijah the prophet was there, and there was a young man in the city, and the young man was very worried because he thought that the city was going to fall and their lives would be lost. Looking at it naturally he was quite right; there was one little city and an immense army round about it. Elijah asked God, “I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see”, 2 Kings 6: 17. And the young man looked and instead of looking down from the walls at the enemies he looked up! “The mountain was full of chariots of fire and horses round about Elisha”; there were more with the two of them than there are with enemies. You might be able to see the physical enemies, and you might know what is within too, and perhaps that is not as you would wish it to be, but “greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world”, 1 John 4: 4. It is not a question of ordinary arithmetic. There is more with believers than Satan could ever put his hand on, and he is defeated, and this One to whom honour is given, “Worthy is the Lamb”, is the One who has defeated him. And the answer is in “ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands”, and then “every creature which is in the heaven and upon the earth and under the earth, and those that are upon the sea, and all things in them, heard I saying, To him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, blessing, and honour, and glory, and might, to the ages of ages”. Do you remember when it said in Philippians that God has highly exalted Christ and “granted him a name that which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings”, chap 2: 9-10? John actually saw something of this happening! This is not speculation, that every knee will bow to the One to whom God has committed everything.

But the question is, what about you? Have you bowed the knee to Jesus; is He the One, is He the “one among a thousand”? Is He “the chiefest of ten thousand”? And even if there are “ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands”, is He still the One that is supreme? He is to me! And I am confident that He is to many throughout the world. But I want you to be sure for yourself because that is what matters. At the end it says, “And the four living creatures said, Amen”; that is to say that there was a universal acknowledgement of the fact that this was true. The elders, who represent persons who

have experience with God, “fell down and did homage”. The things that believers here and elsewhere too, are passing through, are real, but what they are meant to produce is experience with God, and what you will find, is that God will never let you down, ever! We might let ourselves down, and I have done that, but God will never let you down because all His thoughts are centred in Christ, the One, the Man of His choice, the Man of all His counsels. God is going to head up all things in the Christ, and Christ is going to bring everything in perfection to Him who is God and Father, that God may be all in all.

That is all I have to say and I trust the Lord may bless it.

For His Name's sake.

Glasgow

29th August 2021