

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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NRC I thought where we were this morning we got a real deep sense and impression as to the power that the Lord had over death, going into it and then coming out of it in power as well. I was just affected by that. We sang hymn 152, which is a comforting hymn:

Thou, Lord to death's domain
Didst go alone.
Death had on Thee no claim,
Thou sinless One!
He who had death's dread power
Met Thee in that dark hour:
Vanquished by Thee his power
By Thee alone.

But Thou hast burst the grave,
Risen art Thou;
Death could not Thee enslave,
Death had to bow!

Death is a very powerful matter, something we will all have to meet if the Lord does not come before that time. We see the power of death; we have seen it in recent days and the sorrow it brings; but there is a real sense of comfort in knowing, dear brethren, that the Lord has gone into that place, and He has gone into that place in power, and He has not only gone into it in power but He has been raised in power as well, and He lives for evermore.

I suggest this that I might receive help, but I thought we got a sense in John 11 as to Lazarus that we see the Lord's power when He was here as Man on this earth. There was a sense of power that He had over death as Man here. In Luke 23, although it does not speak directly of His power, I thought about the way that the malefactor spoke to Him, "Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom"; even at what man thought would have been His weakest point, He was able to say to him, "To-day shall thou be with me in paradise". The Lord knew the power that was in Him. In Thessalonians there is the power in which He will come again. It is a great thing for believers to have that

hope in our hearts of knowing that the Lord will come again, and He will come again in power. In Luke 2, I had the impression that He is the all-powerful One and yet the greatness and glorious thought of His manhood is that He came here in a simple form as a Babe, “wrapped ... in swaddling-clothes”, and, “there was no room for them in the inn”. That brings out the glory of His manhood and the perfection of Himself. But I am suggesting this that I might get help more than anyone here. I thought we had a good time this morning even though it was just the two brothers present, but we got a sense of His power, did we not?

DHM Yes, I think that is right. I am really glad you brought this forward because there is something attractive about the way the Lord Jesus dealt with the whole matter of death. What you have referred to in Lazarus shows He had power there like no other man, but laying down His life and entering into the domain of death is very attractive. It shows how distinctive He was in His manhood and how powerful He was in that sense as well. Yet at His incoming we see there was no room for Him, and that was the One who was going to be the Saviour, the One who was going to deal with death. The fact that He has broken the power of death is something to encourage us. We have had a lot of sorrow, and have at the moment amongst us, with brethren being taken, and that is the Lord's will, and we have to accept that, but it is good to know the Lord has been into death and dealt with death in power.

NRC I got a sense of that this morning, that line that I have quoted:

Death had to bow!

I was impressed with the face of the Lord Jesus before death. What could death do? It could only bow to Him, the greatness of His being, the greatness of His manhood; everything that encompasses the Lord is seen in power going into death, and men would have seen Him in His weakness there on the tree, but He did not go into death in weakness; He went there in power. That is a thought to cheer our hearts in relation to the greatness of Christ and the power which He holds.

DHM Remember that death had no claim on the Lord Jesus! He entered that area, that domain that men hold in fear and dread and, as you say,

Death had on Thee no claim
Death had to bow!

JTB The first scripture is very comforting. It has often been

suggested that if He had not said, "Lazarus", everyone who was dead would have come out, such was His power, but it was selective resurrection, and Lazarus was the subject of this great act of power. "And the dead came forth ...".

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

The Lord Jesus is "marked out Son of God in power ... by resurrection of the dead", Rom 1: 4.

NRC He had that power before He even came into this scene. He was the all-powerful One. What you have said in terms of marking out Lazarus is good. It says before that, "They say to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept", v 34, 35. Think of the affection the Lord has for His own! In some ways He would have had you and me and all of His own in His mind when He went into death, that is the individual aspect of it. He went in and annulled death in its entirety, but He would have had us all in His mind, would He not?

JTB You quoted your first hymn this morning. We had one where the third verse began,

Borne in thy heart through death's dark tide (Hymn 347).

We were on His heart; He bore us there. Death was there in all its awfulness, but we were on His heart, in His affections.

NRC My impression was that we can take comfort from it. Death is a very sorrowful thing and it affects us all in different ways, loved ones that have come and gone, but what comfort there is for the believer in knowing that the all-powerful One has gone into that place, and I think what is more wonderful than that is that not only has He gone into it, but He has come out of it as well and He lives for evermore.

DCB Does the fact that Jesus wept earlier show the effect of death upon His spirit as taking on this? It was not a simple act of power; it was a matter of His divine feelings in relation to what had come in.

NRC I think it is good to bring that out; I was thinking that as well. To the Lord, 'death was death' (JND vol 7, p169), was it not? It was a very real thing. "His sweat became as great drops of blood", Luke 22: 44. There was such a real aspect in relation to the Lord knowing what He would have to go into, but yet it did not deter Him from that either. Does that not bring out the affection that He had not only for Lazarus but for all of His own, the fact that He knew what He was going into and yet, under the Father's will, He went that way and He went that way for us all? I felt

this morning after the emblems returned to the table, that we have the response to Him because of that, because He has gone into death and He has come out of it, come out of it triumphantly. So we were able to respond to Him, would you say?

DCB So one of the interesting things here is what the Lord does not do. He gives it to others to “Loose him and let him go”. The power is there to raise from the dead and, of course, the Lord has power for all things, but He is bringing the person who is raised into a circle where others will affectionately set him free. There is something of that which we experience as we come together, and what follows the Supper, that there is a loosing so that we can have our part in a response to the love that has been shown towards us.

NRC All the children of Israel had to cross over the Jordan, did they not? So I suppose we all must go through death with Christ, and the other side of that was the land flowing with milk and honey. There is much to work out, but the result is a desire from divine Persons that there is a response to them, a response because that One has gone into death and come out of it.

DCB We had the reference at meetings yesterday, “If ye have died”, Col 2: 20. We are not asked the question whether we have; we are not told to die or anything like that; but the believer is looked at in that way: “If ye have died with Christ from the elements of the world”. It is to affect our life that we have died, that we are presented in that way in scripture.

TWL I was thinking about this whole matter of the power that Christ had over death. The power of death was not broken when He came out of it; the power of death was broken when He went into it. He always had power over death; He always had the glory of God in mind, which was what was seen in the raising of Lazarus, but His power over death was proved when He went into it having power over it. It was not that it was broken when He came out of it. Is that right?

NRC That was my reason for starting off in this particular section: “And having said this he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth”. And immediately it says, “And the dead came forth”; so before He even entered into death, power over death itself brought Lazarus forth at the command of the all-powerful One.

TWL We referred to:

What ailed thee, thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou turnedst back?

The people of Israel went over on dry ground because the ark had gone there before. Speaking carefully, the saints who are “asleep through Jesus” did not have the same to deal with as the Lord did when He went there; it is important to remember that. We go over on dry ground. The way through death has been prepared. That is His power.

NRC The sting of death has been taken away forever, has it not, due to the completed and finished work of Christ? I think we can take great comfort in knowing that. For believers who will fall asleep in Jesus before the Lord comes again, the sting of death has been taken away because a glorious Man in power has gone into death and He has annulled it completely. But for the Lord, 'death was death'. He had to go into it and He had to annul its power, but He was victorious over the grave. That hymn that we sung this morning refers to it:

Death had to bow!

THB Could you say some more about the power of death being done away with when the Lord went into it, rather than in His coming out? It says in Mark's gospel that the Lord “uttered a loud cry”, chap 15: 37. He went into death in power. In one sense the matter of atonement had been dealt with, but the witness to us is His rising. I am just asking for help.

TWL It is important to understand that the Lord was never obedient to death. He became “obedient even unto death”, Phil 2: 8. That was, He moved into that position. At no point in time did death have power over Him in the sense of control. He went into death. “I lay down my life that I may take it again No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself”, John 10: 17, 18. That is what He did going into it; the reference in John 11 is important, and the Psalm bears it out. It is said that “When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of Jehovah ... rest in the waters of the Jordan” (Josh 3: 13); that is the Lord going into death. That is when the Jordan left, not when the ark came up out the other side. It is important to see that; so we go through on dry ground. For actual death believers may go through it as those who are “asleep through Jesus”, and Christ has gone before.

Ephesians 4 helps, “But that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth?”, v 9. It was His own act; He went into death Himself. I like the scripture in Job 38,

Hast thou entered as far as the springs of the sea? and hast thou walked in the recesses of the deep?”, v 16.

The Lord Jesus explored, speaking reverently, covered all death's

domain, and then,

Have the gates of death been revealed unto thee? and hast thou seen the gates of the shadow of death?", v 17.

He saw the gates but went through them in His own power and His own strength. It is fine just to absorb our souls and affections in the glory of that.

NRC I like the verse in Jonah that says,
The weeds were wrapped about my head.
I went down to the bottoms of the mountain", chap 2: v 5, 6.

He went there Himself, did He not?

DHM It is good to see it was the Lord's own act. What the world saw was the Lord Jesus nailed to the cross, what men had done to Him, but what we are talking about here is not that. He went that way Himself. No other man could deliver up his spirit, lay down his life, like this. It is the distinctiveness of the work and the perfection of His manhood that we see in that that is so attractive. We see the two sides, the public side that the world sees, and then this side, almost a private side, something very affecting, just as His resurrection was not for the world; it was for His own.

NRC That was my thought in relation to Luke 23, especially in relation to one of the malefactors: "Dost thou too not fear God, thou that are under the same judgment? and we indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done; but this man has done nothing amiss. And he said to Jesus, Remember me, Lord, when thou comest in thy kingdom". I get the impression that that man saw the power that was there in that Man and he knew that He was coming back again in His kingdom. How did he know that He was coming back in His kingdom? I do not know, and it has always been a mystery to me to try and understand that as to how that man knew. He must have had some impression in relation to it, but the power of Jesus comes forth, and Jesus says to him, "Verily I say to thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise". How could a man who is not in power make such a statement?

DHM Exactly. It is a very attractive scripture, often used in the gospel, but God had been working with this man; it must have been so. Again, what the world would see would be criminals being crucified for what they justly deserved to die for, but God had been working with this man so much that he could identify that the Man that was hanging there was

different from any other man. He saw something there that maybe no other man saw, but he saw something because the work of God had begun in his soul.

DCB It is remarkable that the Lord “cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth”, and then He “cried with a loud voice” on the cross. The scriptures use exactly the same term, “cried with a loud voice”. The power, in that sense, was not diminished. On the other side, He was “crucified in weakness” (2 Cor 13: 4), and again He tasted “death for everything” (Heb 2: 9), suggesting the reality of it to Him. As you said, to Him ‘death was death’; the tasting of it would suggest what it was as to the bitterness of it, so that bitterness should be removed for the believer.

NRC That passage we have read in John 11 in relation to Lazarus is very interesting. I have often thought that you cannot imagine what the Lord must have felt when He saw death coming in with Lazarus, His friend; and yet He commanded him to come out with His voice, knowing that He was about to go into death Himself. We cannot come fully into the feelings of the Lord, but I read in Luke 2 because I think it emphasises the glory of His manhood, the greatness of Him as Man here in this scene, that not only did He come into the scene as Man, but He died as well as Man, and He tasted death for us all; it was real to Him.

DCB So what we have at Gethsemane would give us His feelings in the face of knowing He was going to suffer the divine judgment, and also the cup of death.

DHM That shows that for the Lord Jesus it was a real matter, and He felt it. He had real feelings in relation to the death of Lazarus, and what you have just said emphasises that. It was something He felt and felt strongly in relation to.

DCB We get some thought of His feelings in the Psalms, most especially in Psalm 22; what it meant to Him to face that, and the cry, and then the triumph, “Yea, from the horns of the buffaloes hast thou answered me”, v 21.

TWL Would it be right to think of this in Luke 23, when He cried with a loud voice and said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit”, that it was His power in love and subjection? It is the energy in which He delivered up His spirit, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit”. The power of the Lord was not just in power He had over death but over the circumstances that surrounded His committal in relation to the will of

His Father. All of those things involved His power. Would that be right?

NRC He had the power to do so; He had the power to lay down His life and He had the power to take it again. Everything that the Lord did was done in power, but He was seen in grace and mercy as well. We preach Him as the Saviour Jesus, the One who has gone into death and come out again, so we can take comfort from that, can we not? It is a wonderful comfort for those who are sorrowing at present to know that there is One that has taken the sting of death away, that He has made that journey possible for us all to go through death and meet Him on the other side.

TWL And such is the importance of Luke's gospel when He says to them, "Handle me and see" - that is the reality of a Man - "for a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see me having" (chap 24: 39) is the reality of His manhood. It does not say that in the other gospels, but it does here: "for a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see me having". When we bury the bodies of the saints, they are not as to their bodies fully in the purposes of God, but we commit their body to the Lord for resurrection's day. So we read in 1 Thessalonians, "the dead in Christ shall rise", that is, from the place of their burial. It is not their spirit and their soul; it is the body. It shall rise.

NRC Yes, and it is a wonderful comfort to know. I always take great comfort when there is a burial meeting in relation to a brother or sister that there is a victory involved in it. We do not eulogise anybody in relation to who they are as a person. We bring Christ into it because He is the One that has gone into death and He has come out of it so, although sorrowful in many ways, and I know that, it is also a great comfort to know that in death, from a believer's point of view, there is a victory involved in it.

These people here were gazing on the Lord. It says, "And all those who knew him stood afar off, the women also who had followed him from Galilee, beholding these things". Before that it says, "And all the crowds who had come together to that sight, having seen the things that took place, returned, beating their breasts". What a sorrowful situation, but maybe the work of God would have gone within these persons themselves.

TWL And I suppose that is another thing to think about too in relation to His power towards the saint who has died. It says in John in relation to Lazarus, "Lazarus, our friend, is fallen asleep", chap 11: 11. That was the reality on the outside. The reality on the inside for the saints

who are gone is that they are “asleep through Jesus”, waiting to hear His voice again to raise them. That is the power that is there with Him; so they are asleep through Him and they are going to wake through Him; but to the world they have died. It is fine to think in all of this that His power is great enough so that they are conscious of what it is to be “asleep through Jesus” and “with the Lord”. That is all part of His power, is it not?

NRC And it is a tremendous comfort to think that as well. I take great comfort in reading this section in Thessalonians, “so also God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus”. It is a very comforting thing. It is a very comforting thing to know that someone that you have loved who has gone into death is now “asleep through Jesus”, and will be awakened again; so we can take comfort from that in knowing that those that have fallen asleep will be woken again and be with Him for evermore.

JTB That is indeed a comfort. I was thinking of Lazarus, when he came forth he was still bound with the trappings of death, you might say, but when the Lord came out of death, we have “the linen cloths ...and the handkerchief which was upon his head ... folded up in a distinct place by itself” (John 20: 6, 7); that is the aura of power. Everything was in order when the Lord came out of the grave. I just thought that when Lazarus came forth from the grave there was a demonstration, the Lord showing that He had exerted His power in bringing Lazarus forth, but, for Himself, He had the power to do it. So there was something further, and, as his loved ones loosed him, I think every article of these graveclothes they took off would demonstrate too that the One who had brought Lazarus forth was the One who had supreme power over death. I wondered if that was why the graveclothes were still on Lazarus, but not with the Lord Jesus Himself, for whom the power was absolute.

NRC So the graveclothes would have been put on, but in resurrection the graveclothes are to be taken off.

JTB Peter entered the grave of the Lord Jesus, and he saw “the linen cloths lying, and the handkerchief which was upon his head”. As Mr James Taylor says, some hand had respectfully placed that cloth on the Lord Jesus's head, but a divine power had taken it away (vol 49 p366). It was a further exercise of His power that there was no longer a linen cloth on the head of Jesus when He came out of the grave. Lazarus “came forth, bound feet and hands with graveclothes”, but not the Lord Jesus. He came out in the supreme demonstration and expression of

life.

DHM Death was a finished matter when the Lord rose. He had said to death, dealt with it, and there is a dignity attached to it as well. Lazarus died; when you come to Stephen, “he fell asleep”, Acts 7: 60. That is how we view it now for the believer: he fell asleep through Jesus.

NRC Although we see the immense power that He had over death in relation to Lazarus, the Lord still had to go into it at that point. When we come to Stephen, the Lord had been into death and He had been raised again; so Stephen “fell asleep”, but we see here in John 11 the power even before Jesus went into death, the power He had over it. It is a wonderful blessing to know that those who have fallen asleep in Jesus are safe with Him.

This scripture in Thessalonians is a real comfort to know. My impression in relation to this was the power in which He will come again: “for the Lord himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God, shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord”. I think the way that section finishes is very encouraging: “So encourage one another with these words”. It is a real encouragement to think of that, that there are “those who have fallen asleep”, but we should be encouraged in relation to where they are at present.

DHM What you have highlighted there again is very important. We know the God of all encouragement, One who shows compassion. He is One who sympathises, but more than that He would seek to encourage us. We may say that at a time of death the world does not see that as any time for encouragement, but the God that we have come to know would seek to encourage us. The Lord has “borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isa 53: 4), but more than that would seek to encourage us; so this is a great encouragement and a hope for the believer.

NRC It is a wonderful word to use. You know yourself what it is like, and what great encouragement there is in knowing that to the believer there is hope. We live in a world where man strives towards trying to grasp it, but hope is seen in a Man. It is not in anything in this world or the systems that make up this world. The hope in a believer's heart is far greater than anything this world can ever entertain. It is seen in a Man that has come out of death and is living on high.

JTB Is it not a great comfort that in 2 Timothy 1, that epistle that really predicates the breakdown of the church, it starts off, “but has been made manifest now by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has annulled death” - what power is in annulling death! - “and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings”, chap 1: 10. What a theme for the glad tidings that death has been annulled!

NRC That is very good and encouraging and it goes on, “and brought to light life and incorruptibility by the glad tidings”; so it goes back to hope, the hope in a Man through the glad tidings, the grace and mercy that has been shed abroad to all of our hearts. Not only has He annulled death, but He has brought us into divine things, and we can experience eternal things now, through the glad tidings; so that was really my thought as to being encouraged and to recognise the power in which we know that Man for ourselves.

DCB So in 1 Thessalonians 4: 14, “For if we believe that Jesus has died and has risen again”; and everything then flows forward from that. Is there the suggestion that there is a power demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ? Now, it is not yet demonstrated as it will be in the rapture, but it is being demonstrated, and we know that power; we have faith in the One who has risen from the dead and therefore we have confidence that everything in the rest of the chapter will take place.

NRC I was thinking as you were speaking as to that hymn that says,

By faith we see
Jesus with highest honour crowned (Hymn 20);

So we have to believe. The Lord Jesus has shed His precious blood, and everything has been made available so that we can come into the gain of these things, which is a test for us: “For if we believe that Jesus has died and has risen again, so also God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus”. At first we have to come to a realisation in our own hearts that Christ has died for us, and not only has died but has risen again so that we can come into the gain of these things.

SCL Do you think then verse 18 ties in with those that removed the graveclothes from Lazarus? It says Lazarus's hands and feet were bound and his face bound round with a handkerchief. Those who removed the graveclothes would give Lazarus a sense of liberty that has been established in the power of the Lord as well as what He has overcome in death. It is one thing to be conscious that the Lord has saved us from death, but there is an encouragement there as to the

liberty that He has established as well, do you think?

NRC Yes, I do. There must have been a great encouragement to those who were round about to see Lazarus come forth, but I need help in it, especially in relation to the end of verse 44: "Jesus says to them, Loose him and let him go". There was a test there for those who were with Him, Mary and Martha. It was a big test for Mary and Martha in relation to what the Lord was saying, was it not?

JTB They doubted, did they not? "if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11: 21), but the Lord in His ways allowed delay to come to the spot. Even when He arrived in the vicinity there was almost some discord, was there not? But then, what a triumph it must have been in their hearts when they found that the brother whom they loved was raised again. As they unbound them, every article of those graveclothes that they took off must have thrilled their hearts that he was being restored in life, one that had actually been in the tomb for four days, and stinking. If you had had that experience, speaking soberly, how must you have felt? It really is quite a thrilling scripture that someone should actually be raised from the grave by the power of this blessed One whom we love and adore, and are grateful to for His all-sufficient sacrifice, that He actually annulled death, went into death.

NRC "So encourage one another with these words": we cannot come into or even understand the Lord's timings and how He allows certain things, but we can take encouragement in it, can we not, that His timing is perfect, and it is seen in evidence as you have brought out here? Mary and Martha perhaps would have preferred that Lazarus did not go into death, and the Lord would have been there sooner, but everything worked out, and in all things Christ's ways and wonderful actions are perfect in every way. Does that help?

SCL I wondered in some ways if it ties into the initial thought of salvation within a person, but then in the breaking of bread there is a sense of movement that is also granted, which has also been established through the Lord's power and that carries us through a scene marked by death. But in one sense we are not necessarily affected by that: we are occupied with the Man who is in glory.

NRC The Supper is something we should take more encouragement from. We move in a scene which is away from death into a new and living sphere, a sphere which He occupies, and that is a wonderful thing.

I did not want to say much in relation to Luke's gospel but I was

impressed that we have been occupied with the power of Christ in relation to death, but we have such a different situation here in relation to the incoming of Christ, and I wondered whether it brings out the glory of His manhood. Not only did He go into death in power; He was raised in power by the Father as well; but He came into the scene to be a Babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and there was no room for Him in the inn. He was laid in a manger, such a small area, and this was the Lord of glory, which magnifies the greatness of Him in Himself, do you think?

DCB Yes; another of the references in the hymn we began with was to the Lord's suffering love. Now, God's love has been towards mankind from the beginning, and there was demonstration of that in creation, but it required a Man for it to be suffering love, and here He has come in, and the very moment He appears in the scene there is no room for Him. He is suffering in that way in reproach from the very moment of His entrance to this scene; yet He is able to take things up, as the next few verses show, "a Saviour ... who is Christ the Lord", v 11. Everything is going to be accomplished in this One who has come in in this suffering, loving pathway.

NRC He could have come in in power. He had the right to do so, but He came in in a suffering way. Is one reason for that that our affections towards Him would be magnified because of that? If He had come in in power, it would have been for the world to see, but He came in in such a way that the world did not even look upon Him. There was no room for Him in the inn; so our affections for Him would be greater because of that. Is that right to say?

DCB You see the excellence of what does surround that incoming with Mary and with Joseph and with the shepherds. The world has no room for Him, but there are those who essentially are cast out themselves by the world who find a place where He is cared for. It is very attractive that He was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. He came into a scene where He could not do it Himself, not detracting from the fact that He always remained who He was, but He has come into a scene where He was dependent on persons wrapping Him up, and then when it comes to His death, it is the same. He came to a point where someone has to intervene to care for His body again.

TWL He came into the scene knowing He was going to die, and had the power to effect what was to be for God. All of that is related to His death, and related to His power. Would that be right?

NRC What has been said brings out the fact of what we said earlier

that to Him 'death was death'. There was nothing that was taken away from it. For the all-powerful One, although He had the power over it, it was still death to Him. We ended our time this morning with hymn 20; the last lines are:

Nought is concealed,
O God, of all Thy wondrous plan,
Divine perfection in a Man!

Everything that was brought into this scene in relation to the incoming of the Lord was perfect in every way before God. He lived a life in complete perfection; He lives now for evermore in perfection as well.

JTB I commend it to young brethren to read Mr Darby's remarks that have been referred to, speaking of what the Lord suffered in anticipation of the bearing of sin, and of death, JND vol 7 p169. 'And for Him was death. Man's utter weakness, Satan's supreme power'. That was the power of death anticipated by the Lord Jesus; and he goes on to say 'without one ray of light even from God', which refers to the forsaking. That was included in His sufferings, of course, and death was another aspect of them, but it is very affecting just to think of it all, "For Him, death was death. Man's utter weakness, Satan's extreme power, and God's just vengeance, and alone, without one sympathy, forsaken of those whom He had cherished, the rest His enemies, Messiah delivered to Gentiles and cast down, the judge washing his hands of condemning innocence, the priests interceding against the guiltless instead of for the guilty - all dark, without one ray of light even from God'.

NRC At the beginning of John's gospel it says, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light appears in darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not", chap 1: 5. Does that not really just underline how dark death was for Christ?

Edinburgh

19th February 2023

List of initials (all Edinburgh):

D C Brown; J T Brown; T H Bailey; N R Cumming; T W Lock;
S C Lock; D H Marshall

THE BOSOM OF JESUS

Alan A Croot

John 13: 23-25

We are reading this book at home where I am local, and we read this chapter at the time when our brother was taken. All who knew our brother will understand why I make the connection between our brother and this passage. I believe he knew what it was to be in the bosom of the Lord Jesus, and I desire that all of us here may know that place.

I begin with a reference that Moses makes in Deuteronomy 33: 2, 3, at the end of his blessing before his death; one of the things he says is,

Jehovah came from Sinai,
And rose up from Seir unto them;
He shone forth from mount Paran,
And he came from the myriads of the sanctuary;
From his right hand went forth a law of fire for them,

but then it says,

Yea, he loveth the peoples.

I understand that that word “loveth” here comes from a Hebrew word that is unique in Scripture; it occurs nowhere else and it means, ‘to have in the bosom’. I draw attention to Moses here at the beginning of Scripture, because he knew God in a special way. It says of Jehovah Himself that He “spoke with Moses face to face”, Exod 33: 11. This was a man who beheld His form. Think how close Moses was to Jehovah, and Moses knew that Jehovah loved His people so much that He wanted them in His own bosom.

Isaiah also makes reference to this idea: “He will feed his flock like a shepherd: he will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; he will gently lead those that give suck.”, chap 40: 11. Dear brethren and friends, this is the character of God Himself. This is His desire, that He should carry His own people in His own bosom. That is a place of intimate affection, a place where we can know Him, know Him for what He is, for God is love.

I come to John, who writes one of the last books in the Bible, if not the last book, and John records for us, “No one has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, *he* hath

declared him”, chap 1: 18. John appreciated the position Jesus had in the very bosom of the Father. What a wonderful picture of mutual harmony and love, the sight of the Lord Jesus in the bosom of the Father. How wonderful, dear brethren, to be taught of one, John, who was here with the Lord Jesus in His pathway, and learned His love, and had the secret made known to him that Christ had that place. John writes when the Lord was ascended in heaven, but as a Man He always had that place, in the bosom of the Father.

Where I read in John 13, we have one of the most serious things recorded in Scripture: the betrayal of the Lord Jesus. I did not read that, but that is the context in which John makes this passing reference. He says that he himself was “in the bosom of Jesus”. What a place John had - in the bosom of the Lord Jesus; in the face of this most difficult issue, John was at rest in the bosom of the Lord Jesus. John was there, in a place that could not be more intimate, in the bosom of Christ Himself. He knew what that resource was, he knew what that comfort was, he knew the stability that resulted from being in that place and, despite issues, arising he remained there. I have been local with our brother almost all my life, and I knew what it was to work out matters with him according to Scripture, and he was always in the spirit of one who knew this place.

I trust dear brethren it is attractive to all of us. You might say, 'Well, John was an apostle'. Yes, he was an apostle, in that sense what is apostolic is unique, and yet there is room in this place for every believer. It is not unique to John: it is available to us all; our brother knew it. You had but to see his face to realise that he knew this place. You had to but speak with him and he would impart to you something of the character of being in the bosom of the Lord Jesus Himself. Dear brethren, this place is available to all of us. The door is open to you. Will you avail yourself of it?

It might mean leaving things behind. You cannot enter into the bosom of Christ with pride in your heart or ambitions in this world. They are all to be left to one side; but it is worth leaving all natural things behind, and taking up your place in the bosom of Jesus: make it your place. It is not just John's place; it is available to all of us to be in the presence of the Lord Jesus, in His bosom. It says, “he, leaning on the breast of Jesus”. We have been taught it is a place of support, a place of strength. It is a place of wonderful comfort; it is a place where all the resource of the compassion of God lies, in the heart of the Lord Jesus

Himself and our brother whilst no longer in the body, in spirit still knows that love. How wonderful it is that our brother is still able to receive communications of divine love despite not being in the body any longer. He is not able to respond, but he still knows what that love is; that which he has known in his lifetime, he knows still the love of Christ. May we know it dear brethren and friends.

May the Lord bless the word.

Edinburgh

24th April 2023

At the burial meeting for David J Hutson

“FAIRER THAN THE SONS OF MEN”

Eric C Burr

PSALM 45: 2

We have been engaged, beloved, while we have been together, with some consideration in relation to the Holy Spirit, and I would suppose, to judge from the spirits of the saints, that the Spirit would be becoming magnified amongst us, and that our impressions in relation to Him would be becoming enlarged. I would suppose, too, that this is something in which the spiritual amongst us - in which I would love to include all - would desire to be increased, that the Spirit might be magnified to us.

Reference was made in the first reading to the capacity that we have to honour the Spirit, and I think that that is a line on which all of us would desire to increase. Certainly the question of knowing the Spirit is one in which we would do well to increase. The blessed Spirit has drawn very, very near to us. He is here, Christ having gone on high, and He is not only with us but He is in us. He is very, very near to us. Let us, every one of us, commit ourselves to getting to know Him better! I think that, in these days, there is an increasing need for us all to develop in the knowledge of the Spirit. I think that this would help to preserve us from going astray.

Let us never think that we have been through the last conflict. Let us never think that having got through stormy water of various kinds we are now just set for home with fair seas and fair weather. There will be conflict of one kind or another until the end of the testimony here, and one thing which will maintain the saints in security against it is an intimate acquaintance with the Holy Spirit. He, after all, has been charged with the testimony all the time that the testimony is needed. We, therefore, would do well to increase in our knowledge of Him and our reliance on Him - indeed, as we were saying, our trust in Him - so that we might be more and more established to go through until the end of the time of testimony. If you think about what the Spirit does in magnifying Christ, and engaging us with the things of the Father, the things of God, you will be more and more spiritually and wonderingly astonished at the extent of what He is able to introduce us into. As indeed Paul says to the Corinthians, “Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard ... which God has prepared for them that love him, but God has revealed to us by his Spirit,” 1 Cor 2: 9, 10. We might ask one another, beloved, 'How much of this has the Spirit revealed to you?'

How well acquainted are you with things that eye has not seen and ear not heard? How much of these depths has the Spirit explored for you and brought up for you? How real is your knowledge and your understanding of these things that lie in depths and heights, that lie in areas into which the natural mind of man, whatever capacity he may have, is completely incompetent to penetrate, and only attempts to penetrate to his own bafflement and ultimate defeat? How much have we been committed to the Spirit in the exploration of these wondrous things?

Have you ever reflected, too, on the capacity that the Spirit demonstrates every moment of every day to restrain evil in the world? Do you ever think of the extent of the power of the Spirit in that connection? You see things break the surface and one thing and another comes out, and it just gives you an impression of how much evil there is operating underneath, and yet "he who restrains", restrains, 2 Thess 2: 7. Can you contemplate how much more actively evil this world would be if the Holy Spirit were not operating here? All these things should enter into our minds as we think more and more about the way in which the Holy Spirit is here and the knowledge that we are to have of Him. Let us commit ourselves, and, if we are spared, let us seek grace from the Lord, that our understanding of the Spirit may be further increased, even during our time together in this place, so that we may be developed in elements which are fundamental, not only to the continuance of the testimony, but to the enjoyment of Christianity.

But if we are engaged with the Spirit, we shall not long be engaged with Him - although we may be detained for a moment on the things that He in His marvellous divine capacity is able to do - before He will turn to His normal service of glorifying Christ. I think that this is a service in which the saints are always happily ready to be the objects of the Spirit's service. The Lord says, "He shall glorify me" (John 16: 14), and I believe, beloved, that this is the normal service of the Holy Spirit, to glorify Christ. I think that all the brethren would say that this is a service in which the Spirit delights, more than in anything else that He undertakes, the glorifying of Christ. And, therefore, I have just read this verse in this psalm, partly because I was thinking about it when we were together for the Supper last Lord's day morning. It is not the first time I have thought about it at the Supper, and I do not suppose it will be the last; and I do not suppose it will be the first time you have thought about it, nor that it will be the last either. What impressions you get of a Man that God has blessed for ever! Do you get impressions like that at

the Supper? And then we are tested as to how far we can carry these things through the week, and how far they have been amplified in our souls under the power of the Spirit, so that when we come towards the end of the week we expect to have something matured and developed in us in relation to the attractiveness of this One with whom the Spirit delights to engage us and with whom the Father is always pleased to see us engaged.

The Book of Psalms is not a very easy book to expound. I suppose anyone who serves, or anyone who has any capacity to teach, would say that. There are, after all, one hundred and fifty in it and that takes some embracing. Nor are individual psalms easy books, but, beloved, the impressions that there are in the Psalms in relation to the various psalmists' impressions of God and, typically, of Christ, are really supreme in the extensiveness of what they cover. I do not suppose there is a book in Scripture which explicitly brings out more detail in relation to the glories and attractiveness of Christ. Indeed, if one refers to the beginning of Hebrews where it says that "he inherits a name more excellent than they" (Heb 1: 4), brethren will remember that that remark was made immediately in the context of a number of quotations from the Psalms, showing that the name which He inherits which is more excellent than that of angels, is a name that He acquires in the experiences of the saints. This is a very wonderful thing - the name which Christ is acquiring out of the experiences of the saints. That is what you will find developed in the Book of Psalms.

Well, what is developing in our own experience in relation to the name that Christ inherits? What kind of psalmist are you? What kind of psalmist am I? It is not quite the same as writing hymns or poetry. What kind of psalmist are you? What kind of impressions of Christ's glory could you commit yourself to, commit to writing? It may not be something in which the significance is on the surface. It may be something which spiritual people, and yourself, as your spirituality increases, have to reflect upon and dwell upon, and you find that these impressions which you had about Him arising out of your own experience are beginning to mature and come together, and form something which is developing in you a more excellent name for Christ. How then do we treat our experiences, beloved? Do we write them off? Most of us are glad to write our experiences off and say, 'Well, that is through and now we shall try and go on'. Is that how we treat our experience? I suppose that in Merton there is as much mixed experience as there would be in any other locality. People have died

here, people have been born here, people have had accidents and sorrows here, people have been married here, and people live ordinary lives here, just as they do in every other locality. Into all these things experience enters, and it is a question whether out of this varied experience a more excellent name for Christ is being developed in the appreciation of the saints. Maybe you can accumulate something yourself out of your experience, but then when we come together it is a question whether all this impression as to Christ's glory which we have learned in experience can be combined with that of the rest of the brethren, so that something goes up freshly in appreciation of Him, goes up to God, but also goes up to Christ Himself.

It is a wonderful thing to think that "he inherits a name more excellent than they", and that that is a name that He has acquired in the experience of the brethren. I think that is the way in which you can distinguish the more excellent name that He has in Hebrews from the name which He has been given by God in Philipians, because that is something that God Himself has given Him; He "has 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 ... to God the Father's glory", Phil 2: 9-11. That is something which God has done, and that is something of which we adoringly take account, the name that God has given to Jesus. What names He has given to Him - He has given Him the name of Lord and of Christ. He has made Him Lord, made Him Christ, made Him, you might say, everything that God will require to bring in the fulness of His thoughts. The wonder of the name that God has given Him is something which will always adoringly impress us, but what it is to come back again to this name more excellent than that of angels which He acquires out of the experiences of the saints!

Let us then refine our experiences. Let us not be quite so hasty in getting through them. Let us count on the Lord's grace as we do go through experiences. Let us prove His coming in and His priestliness which sustains us in our experiences, but let us be sure that out of the experiences we are distilling something in relation to Himself which is going to enter into what this psalmist would begin with: "My heart is welling forth with a good matter". What a place Christ might arrive at in our own affections through all that we may go through! Do you find that Christ acquires something from you when you go through times of pressure? No doubt you do. Do you find that Christ acquires something from you when you go through times of prosperity, or do you

leave that out? A lot of us leave that side out; we say, 'Well, I went through such and such a circumstance and the Lord was with me in it, and I found that this was what He would be to me'. But, beloved, when you were in prosperous circumstances, did you find the Lord was with you in them, and did you find increased glory for Him in the prosperous circumstances as you did in the sorrowing circumstances? Let us see that every one of our circumstances, whether they are bright or dark, is going to contribute something in our experience to an increased and more excellent name for Christ. This verse says, "Thou art fairer than the sons of men". Does every one here think that about Jesus? If I slip into preaching the gospel, I do not suppose the brethren will be slow to forgive me. But when you have Christ before you, you can hardly but think of Him in relation to what He has done in the gospel. But He is presented here as fairer than the sons of men. I would just ask everybody again this evening, whether to them He is fairer than the sons of men. Is He so, beloved? Suppose you went round the room and asked everyone what they thought of Jesus, how many would say, 'Well, to me, He is fairer than the sons of men'? Most of the brethren would. I guess you would feel a bit isolated if you could not say that here this evening, because if there is a circle where Jesus is esteemed as fairer than the sons of men, it is certainly in this area where He has recovered saints on the basis of naming His name.

But, younger brethren, is He to you fairer than the sons of men? Young men here, boys here, is Jesus fairer than the sons of men? Is He? Does your way of life demonstrate that you believe that? I wonder if it does. Who are your heroes now? What kind of heroes do you want - racing car drivers, prominent footballers, eminent cricketers - are these the kind of men you want? Intellectuals, would you like them? Is this the kind of man that you want? Is this what you are looking for, to find someone that is fairer than the sons of men? You are on the wrong tack if you are looking for that, because all these idols have feet of clay, and a moment is coming when they will all come down. And you will find that it is not very long before they come down; they run for a time and then they come down. Men who were the idols of schoolboys in my day, which is not all that long ago, are completely forgotten now. As one of the poets says, 'they have their day and cease to be', and so they do.

But there is presented in Christianity One who is fairer than the sons of men, and, beloved, I would just say this to the young people: we, who are getting in any degree older, are genuinely concerned

about the continuance of the testimony. Not all of us will be here very long - none of us could say, of course, that we would be here until midnight tonight - but just looking at things naturally and subject to the Lord's will, some of us will not be here long, not really. Life begins to run away and in a very little while many of us will have gone, and we are concerned about the continuance of the testimony. And to the young people I would just say this, that it is to you that the Lord is looking in relation to the continuance of the testimony. Meetings like this may have an immediate purpose in carrying forward what the Lord has to say in a place just at the present moment, but the Lord is looking to see that something is getting built into the souls of those who belong to the place, and indeed into the souls of all who come, in order that there may be something established which will carry forward the testimony. And the testimony is going to be carried forward in people to whom Jesus is fairer than the sons of men. If you have your eye on anybody else, be it brother or sister, be it someone prominent in the world, be it who it may, you are not set for the continuance of the testimony.

We were speaking in our local reading last night of 2 Timothy 3 where Paul says, "*thou* hast been thoroughly acquainted with my teaching, conduct, purpose ...", v 10. Now what is the purpose of every one of us here? Is it One who is fairer than the sons of men? One is always attracted by the title of that little book that we have - 'The Moral Glories of the Lord Jesus Christ'. Just think of it, fairer than the sons of men! Do you look for perfection in manhood? You will find it only in Him. Do you look for perfection in any aspect of manhood? You will find it only in Him. Break man down to the component parts of his character and take each one as you will, you will find the perfection of any good only in Him. Beloved, if you want an object you have to find it in Jesus, and you find it on this basis, that He is fairer than the sons of men. Fairer, as the hymn says, than all the sons of men, Hymn 313. He has a moral glory which eclipses the glory of every other man that has been, and in all things He must have the first place. Well, how is He to us? The Spirit would take Him and glorify Him to us. This is not, I think, that He just brings out Jesus to be admired, but the Spirit would bring out Jesus and glorify Him. That is, He would say of Him, He has this glory, and He has that glory, and He has another glory, and the Spirit would engage you with every glory that Jesus has, and when your own capacity to understand them and take them in is in any way full, you will always know that there is further glory which the Spirit will bring forward for you when you have the spiritual capacity to take it on. Let us get this Man as an object for our souls.

What capacity have we to carry this through? What power have we to carry it through? I suppose we have power to carry it through only as the Spirit is able to operate ungrieved in us - certainly unquenched in us, but ungrieved in us; because I suppose that when the Spirit is grieved He is for the moment stopped from His normal service of engaging us with Christ. Come through the week with the Spirit ungrieved - right through the week! Do you look back on the week and have to reflect on how much ground you have lost? How many days were there when the Spirit was not free, how many parts of how many days when you were just not free with the Spirit or the Spirit not free in you? One way of getting into conditions where the Spirit is not free is to be engaged with other men than with Jesus. I do not speak of the Lord's servants and such; they would never in any case want you to be engaged with them as men. Be engaged with them as the Lord's servants because that engages you with Him whose servants they are; but if you get other men before you in some degree the Spirit will be deprived of the opportunity of engaging you with Christ.

Be careful, too, that your thoughts do not sink downward. I suppose that if most of us were examined we would have to confess that at some time our thoughts go down to a fairly low level. Is that not true? Is there not a lot in the world that panders to the lowering of the level of the mind? It is a great mercy - it must be one of the greatest mercies - that on the whole, and I trust absolutely, saints are preserved from reading novels and modern literature. The degrading level on which literature is written now is absolutely astonishing. It is incomprehensible that people can find nothing better to write about than things that relate to the lowest level of activities of mankind. We are to be preserved from that, but think what there is in the world, how advertisements more and more are directed to engaging your mind downward, and with covetousness and with lust. If you could interpret many advertisements, you will find that really they are just pandering to lust, and by lust I mean lust. What a thing it is to have been preserved by the Spirit through the week in engagement with One who is fairer than the sons of men, so that your eye is always elevated and always upward, and always absorbed!

Well, how does Jesus present Himself to you? You might say that in this psalm He comes in as the Messiah. So He does. He came in to Israel as the Messiah, but He went out, beloved, as the Saviour of mankind. He was born here and it was said, "*he shall save his people*

from their sins" (Matt 1: 21), and His people, in its narrow immediate meaning, meant Israel. Those who were waiting for redemption in Jerusalem were looking for Him as Messiah. And He came to them as Messiah, and He operated here in all the grace and effective service that Messiah will yet display. But they put Him to death, and, as is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, He went out as the Saviour of mankind. He was nailed to a cross, not just for Israel, but for the whole of mankind, in order that He might bear away the sin of the world, and that He might be the Saviour of every man and woman in it, if they would only believe in Him.

If you want to see moral excellence, I suppose you find it in its supreme display on the cross. If you had eyes to see, and went to Bethlehem and looked in the manger, you would have seen moral excellence there. "I was cast upon thee from the womb", does it not say, Ps 22: 10? He was cast on God right from His birth. We have often been engaged with the fact that when Jesus came in, He came in in a form which reflected total dependence. There is moral excellence. There is One who is fairer than the sons of men in His moral excellence exhibited in dependence upon God, when He is just a Babe in a manger.

Then you will find Him growing up to be a Boy of about twelve years of age, and subject to His parents. There is moral excellence too. Subjection to His parents, that is an aspect of moral excellence. How widely is that cultivated? How have I cultivated it? How far have we cultivated subjection? "He went down ... and he was in subjection to them", Luke 2: 51. How far is that being cultivated in the next generation where the defiance of parental authority is becoming a characteristic of the day? Is there going to be found amongst us, beloved, a demonstration of the moral excellence of subjection to parents? He went down and was subject to them. Well, is that found amongst our young people - a demonstration of one characteristic, in principle, of One who is fairer than the sons of men, the moral excellence of One who would fill out the duties and responsibilities of the position into which He had come as Man?

Then from twelve years old to thirty years old - even the little that is said about that in Scripture is morally excellent in itself - the moral excellence of an ability to be out of sight. How many of us are good at that? How many of us love the moral excellence of being out of sight? How many of us love the platform, the front place, our names mentioned, and all that kind of thing? How many of us find the moral

excellence of being out of sight an attractive feature that might be found in ourselves? I remember reading a poem many years ago which ends with, 'No man likes to think himself forgot.' Most of us are like that, we do not like to think of ourselves forgotten. Think of the moral excellence of being content to be hidden for eighteen years! I think that when Scripture says nothing about the Lord's activities in that period there is moral excellence in the silence, demonstrating to us the capacity to be content, to be out of sight.

How good to be content not to be prominent, to be content not to have your name brought forward, to be content in the moral excellence that was in Jesus, to know what it is to be hidden! I think that there is moral perfection in the silence of Scripture in relation to those years of the life of Jesus. Fairer than the sons of men - every son of man would be wanting a place for himself. Have you children of twelve? Are they content to be out of sight? If you are a young man of thirty, are you content to be out of sight? Nineteen, twenty-three, these odd ages in between, are you content to be out of sight, to be hidden, to be meek and unnoticed, and unknown, are you content to be that? There is moral excellence in that, and it was seen in One who is fairer than the sons of men. You might think that even if He presented Himself, the excellence of the fairness of the presentation of Himself would itself have secured Him a place. Are we content with the moral quality to be out of sight? Well, that is what marked Jesus and it marked Him for more than half His life - contentment to be hidden. All this enters into the character of One who is fairer than the sons of men, because it is not a quality that naturally marks the sons of men.

The last three-and-a-half years were devoted, as I would suppose the previous years had been (but scarcely anything, as we have been saying, has been said about them), in service, devoted to a demonstration of God, a demonstration of God in grace. "Thou art fairer than the sons of men: grace is poured into thy lips". Well, beloved, this challenges me. Does it challenge you as to how much grace has been poured into your lips? Because grace was poured into His lips, they "wondered at the words of grace which were coming out of His mouth", Luke 4: 22. How much room is there in you or me for grace? We talk about it a lot. How much is it manifested in us, the reality of grace? Think of the grace of One who could say, "I will; be thou cleansed", Luke 5: 13. Think of the grace of One who would touch the bier and tell the dead young man to wake up, and give him to his mother, Luke 7: 14, 15. Think of the grace of One who will say, "Child,

arise”, and command that something to eat be given her, Luke 8: 54, 55. Think of the grace in which He will tarry by the well of Sychar in order to bring a morally dissolute woman to a moral conclusion in herself, so that He might engage her with the glory and greatness of God and the wonder of the service of the Father. Think of the grace of that; think of the grace which, when a man is utterly rejected, will find him and engage him with the Son of God. How much grace marks us? What kind of supply have we? Suppose God started pouring grace into you, how much could you hold? Do you like to retain just these low elements of your own personality? Many of our personalities express themselves with sharp edges, with bitterness, with acute observations, with those bits of penetration which get into people and quite injure them. How many of us are like that? How much of the natural facility of our minds is devoted to giving people a dig? “Grace is poured into thy lips”. Well, beloved, how much have you room for? How much can be poured into us? Think of the wonder of One who came in amongst His own last Lord’s day morning, and everything He said to us was on the line of grace. He would engage us right from the beginning, even give us impressions again that by grace we are saved, and that not of ourselves, it is God’s gift. It is God’s work that we are saved at all. He would give us impressions that it is due to His own grace and to the grace of God that we have any part at all in the wonderful order of things of which we know so much, and experience, I would say, a good deal.

These last three-and-a-half years were filled with a manifestation day after day of One into whose lips grace had been poured. Let us be engaged with Him, beloved! Think of the supremacy of the utterance of grace, for when grace had been poured into His lips out of these lips at the end come the expression, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”, Luke 23: 34. Think of the grace of that, and then wonder at how little any of us is formed by grace at all. These things are not put before us in order to bring us down and make us miserable or dejected about ourselves, or make us think that things are hopeless; they are put before us in order that our eyes might be lifted up, and that as becoming engaged with a Man who is fairer than the sons of men we might begin to make more room for Him and more room for His Spirit. “If any one has not the Spirit of Christ *he* is not of him”, Rom 8: 9. How much of that have we? Some of us cannot have had much time in the development of the Spirit of Christ. Beloved, there is still time to be getting developed in the Spirit of Christ, and room and way are made for it by being engaged with Him as fairer than the sons of men, and the One into whose lips grace is poured.

Such a Man God has blessed for ever. Do you not get an impression on the Lord's day morning that God has blessed Him for ever? Of course, He comes in as God, but He comes in as Man too, and with all the glory that is His as Man. One thing is that He has been raised from the dead by the Father's glory. What a blessing for ever that must be! Death cannot possibly have any dominion over Him any more. He is delivered from its pains and from its bonds, delivered from them for ever. What a blessing this is! "Therefore God has blessed thee for ever" - O, how God has blessed Christ in raising Him from among the dead, so that He now subsists in a condition which is not only incorruptible but which can never be ended. "God has blessed thee for ever" - and, of course, He has blessed Him for ever because, amongst other reasons, the moral attractiveness of the Man who lay in death is such that the Father's glory must claim Him from the grave. His moral excellence demands that the Father raises Him from the grave and blesses Him for ever in the retention of Manhood for ever. Think of what Christ has acquired as a result of becoming Man, that He now retains Manhood for ever, and what God has in an order of Man that was so attractive to Him. He has blessed Him for ever in giving Him to retain Manhood for ever.

And, of course, in His retaining Manhood for ever, He is not alone. He has you and me with Him, amongst others. In the company that He has with Him, He does not just have one or two: He has much fruit. God has blessed Him in this great multiplying number of those who are the fruit of His own death. God has blessed Him in giving Him this fruit, as He says, for instance, "Behold, I and the children which God has given me", Heb 2: 13. God has blessed Him in the fruit that He has given Him as a result of His death and of His rising again. And this is fruit, beloved, that He is not going to lose: He is going to retain it for ever. Just think of that - that Christ is going to retain you for ever. It says in John's gospel that no one can pluck them out of His hand and no one can pluck them out of His Father's hand, John 10: 28, 29. That is in the way He is speaking of them as His sheep, but what it is to know that in the condition of Manhood that He retains for ever He has you with Him, and He is going to have you there for ever. Think of the extensiveness of the fruit that Christ has out of His own death, all that He has as Man! Think of the companions that He has, think of the brethren that He has, think of the assembly that He has!

If He has companions, He has one companion distinguished above all, not just distinguished amongst the companions that He has,

but a companion who really consists of many companions, this single vessel to be His counterpart and His joy, and to be it for ever. God has blessed Him for ever in giving Him the assembly. It is not only that He blessed Him in giving Him forgiven sinners as a result of His death. That would be wonderful, because if God has forgiven sinners then a day will come when Christ comes and everything that He has secured through His death will then be caught up and secured for Him and for God eternally. All the forgiven sinners would be there because God would have no issue to raise with them; but just think that God has not only blessed Him with forgiven sinners, He has blessed Him with the assembly, a companion that He will have for ever. When God said in Genesis that it was not good that man should be alone, "I will make him a helpmate, his like" (Gen 2: 18), He was speaking about man and the highest level of blessing that man can have. Do you find that in your own marriage, beloved brother? In giving you a wife God has given you a blessing above any other blessing that in manhood's condition He could give you, save what He gives you in Christ. But in giving Christ the assembly, He has given Him a supreme blessing, to be not only Christ's companion, but a vessel and in a real sense a vehicle for the service of God for ever. God has blessed Him for ever. He has given Him the assembly, so that the assembly in Christ Jesus should be a vessel of glory to God through all generations of the age of ages.

I do not suppose the sons of Korah thought about the assembly when they wrote this psalm, but at the top of the psalm they wrote, "A song of the Beloved". I think that they must have had some impression that there was a setting coming in where love would be at rest and it would be when God had blessed a Man for ever who is fairer than the sons of men. Does this not throw fresh glory on our apprehension of the assembly itself? In the Song of Songs the spouse is spoken of as all fair - "Behold, thou art fair, my love" (chap 4: 1), and, "Thou art all fair, my love; and there is no spot in thee", v 7. If you think of Him as fairer than the sons of men, in that very condition and in that very description He has a companion who is suitable to Himself and whom He will retain for ever. Just think how God has blessed Christ in giving Him the assembly! I suppose that if the sons of Korah thought about blessing into which they might come, their thoughts would hardly run beyond the Messiah, so they wrote a psalm which is really in substance largely engaged in its direct interpretation with the Messiah, and then they speak about the queen - "upon thy right hand doth stand the queen in gold of Ophir". When you come to the application to us of what they were saying, you can only find it in the assembly as related to Christ

and standing with Him in His headship over everything. O, the wonderful detailed impressions that you get as you dwell upon the Psalms! Do you wonder at the more excellent name that Christ acquires out of the experience of the saints? The experience of the sons of Korah is a song of the Beloved. When you come to reflect on it you find that out of their experience you have anticipations which you can easily relate to the assembly in relation to the Man that God has blessed for ever. It is wonderful how this takes you - this idea of the queen at His right hand in gold of Ophir - to the end of the first chapter of Ephesians - "the assembly, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all."

Well, He will have the assembly as Man and have it eternally. The assembly exactly corresponds to Himself, as that which, in Mr Raven's language, is adequate for His complete display, vol 1 p3. God has blessed Him for ever in giving Him that.

Much could be added in relation to the blessing that God has given Him in regard to Israel and in regard to the nations. He will have the nations for an inheritance and the ends of the earth for a possession. When God sets His King on Zion He will come into everything over which God intends man to rule, He will come into it in a way of glorified display. This present day, though, is the day of the assembly. Our thoughts, as we think about Him being blessed for ever, concentrate on what He has in the assembly. This is a thing which must always give us intense, adoring satisfaction, to think that God has blessed for ever this Man, fairer than the sons of men, with a vessel of which it can be said typically that she, too, is all fair.

Well, beloved, the Spirit carries us through the week and sustains us in relation to what we were able to enjoy when we were together last Lord's day. He holds us in the enjoyment of it in anticipation, if we remain here in the Father's time, of another Lord's day, in order that we might be on the line of increase in what we have brought forward from our past experience out of which Christ is obtaining a more excellent name. May He become more and more the object for every one of us, for His Name's sake!

Merton

25th November 1966

MINISTRY BOOKS

This note lists books of re-printed ministry that are obtainable to buy through a print-on-demand service at www.lulu.com -

'Foundational Ministry' by Edwards Dennett

'Addresses and Other Articles' by William Johnson

'Closing Ministry of Joseph Pellatt' (hardback and softback including articles not found in earlier editions))

'Collected Articles' by Alfred J Gardiner (7 volumes; or 10 in the same smaller size as books of his already published)

'Meetings in Germany' by Alfred J Gardiner

'First Things and Other Ministry' by Jim Renton (two volumes)

'Love of the Truth' by Brian M Deck (£10.00)

'Ministry' by Jim D Gray (2 volumes)

'New Ground for Man' Eric C Burr (meetings in Edinburgh 1972)

'Ministry and Other Articles' by Alex C Craig (volume 1)

There are other books by less well-known authors -

Ministry' by Henry C Anstey (2 volumes from 10 different periodicals 1879-1918)

'Ministry' by William Fergusson (combines 3 booklets from 1930s)

'Collected Addresses' by Fred W Trussler

These books can all be found on the website by searching with the title or author.

Most of these titles are also available to download from the same website as e-books.

Other titles are listed at www.Bibles-etc.com, including a new edition of some volumes of Charles A Coates in a larger font.