

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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RMB In reading these scriptures, dear brethren, it was in mind that we might get an enhanced appreciation of what the local assembly is in the mind of God. I think we are conscious that we are living in increasingly difficult times. Many of the dear brethren are having to work things out in fewness and great weakness, and some in great isolation. It would be easy in such conditions to lose sight of what is proper to the assembly, especially in its local setting. I trust the Lord may be pleased to use this time to revive us as to the importance and dignity and value of the local assembly.

There are three very striking statements of the apostle that I particularly wanted to draw attention to in these passages. In addressing these Corinthian saints he says to them, “ye are the temple of God”, “ye are unleavened”, and “ye are Christ's body”. Those are remarkable assertions, particularly when we think of the unsatisfactory state of things at Corinth. No doubt they were intended to impress the Corinthians, as indeed by extension all of us, with the greatness of the local assembly.

But I thought we should begin with the reference in chapter 1 to “the assembly of God which is in Corinth”. That is a most dignified expression. We might enquire as to what is involved in it; but what a triumph that in the midst of this great worldly city, Corinth, a great pagan and corrupt city, there should be a circle with which the name of God and the testimony of God was identified.

NJH That is a helpful line to pursue. The apostle was taken up specially for the assembly. The other apostles had their time initially in the Jewish setting and then the assembly, but he was brought up entirely for that.

RMB Most of his epistles are addressed to local assemblies. It would give us an impression of the interest of divine Persons in local assemblies. I trust the Lord will help us in going over these things together.

WMP Is it your thought that, while each locality will have its own

situation and conditions, what is in mind is that they ought always to reflect what is to be seen in the assembly of God? There is the divine standard that is to be reflected in each place, regardless of differences of culture or race.

RMB That is helpful. We should say at the beginning that no enlightened believer would regard the company he meets with as being the assembly of God because we are now living in a broken day. But where you have persons in a place who are governed by the light of the assembly you have the thing *in principle*. One thought that comes in in connection with this reference to the assembly of God is the recognition on our part that it is God's property. That is something which is to command our respect, would you say?

WMP Very much so. There were persons at Corinth who were reigning as kings (chap 4: 8), as though in some sense the local company was their property. But it is divine property. What you are saying is very important.

RMB So in connection with this reference to the assembly of God, primarily it has in mind that it is the place where God is being served and where God is represented.

JTB It does not say it is the assembly of the Lord Jesus, but specifically "the assembly of God". Does that mean all the resources of the Godhead were there towards it, do you think?

RMB I do think that. In connection with what you say, I note this first scripture particularly seems to be connected with God the Father, the second scripture with the Holy Spirit and the last two with the Lord Jesus; showing the special interest each of the divine Persons has in local assemblies.

JTB So each local assembly, speaking reverently and respectfully, is self-sufficient in that sense, as having access to that great range of resource, while part of the great universal setting.

RMB That is borne out by verse 3, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ". There is this great flow of grace and peace coming down from above that specially has local assemblies in mind. The apostle Paul wrote thirteen epistles, and I do not include in that the epistle to the Hebrews, although Mr Darby said he had no doubt Paul wrote that one too (Synopsis vol 5 p176). In any case, Paul's name is put to thirteen epistles. Nine of them are

addressed to local assemblies and in each of them, with one exception, we have this thought in verse 3, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ”. I wondered if that is suggestive of special grace for local assemblies. There is divine grace available for individuals, but verse 3 suggests that there is special grace for local assemblies. That would be a particular encouragement for those of our dear brethren who are seeking to go on in fewness and weakness.

PAG Could you say something for our help about the end of verse 2, “both theirs and ours”; what is that intended to signify to us?

RMB Does that remind us that in considering the assembly in its local aspect we should never lose sight of the universal position? In fact, the local aspect takes its bearing from the universal position.

PAG What you say is right and helpful. I was thinking of the reference to “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours”. So the rights of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ apply equally in every local assembly.

RMB It would also provide a bond between local assemblies. The brethren in Linlithgow would understand that the brethren in Glasgow will be interested in how they were getting on, because they would recognise that He is not only their Lord Jesus Christ but He is also that to the brethren in Glasgow.

PAG That is very helpful. Although it is not explicitly stated here, “peace from God our Father” would involve among other things that the flow of affection is present both within and between local assemblies.

NJH While in the world the thought of what is abstract may refer to something unreal, in the divine system it is a very real matter. It speaks here about “those sanctified”. He is speaking to the Corinthians, “those sanctified”, and then, “unleavened”. It shows that in divine things there is every provision for that to be met fully.

RMB So what does that mean, “sanctified in Christ Jesus”?

NJH We sometimes say that sanctification means that you are set apart for holy purposes. Persons are held for the Lord Jesus and in doing so they are available to God the Father.

RMB Do you think that “in Christ Jesus” gives us the measure of the sanctification? Christ Jesus is a name that particularly brings before us what He is in His present position. And God has set out in a blessed

Man, in His presence, all His thoughts of glory and blessing for us, do you think?

NJH Exactly.

RMB And as that is laid hold of by us it will have a great sanctifying effect.

TRC Can you help us as to the persons that Paul is addressing, “called saints”?

RMB What would you say about them?

TRC I think what you are bringing before us is very important as to the assembly of God and the dignity that would mark it. I wondered whether “called saints” was a dignified matter; what persons are in the sight of God who appreciate what the assembly of God is.

RMB It would bear on what has just been drawn attention to. We have been taken up by God for holy purposes. That is what saints are for.

NJH Was not Aaron called “the saint of Jehovah”, Ps 106: 16?

RMB He was. What were you thinking about that?

NJH The divine presence was the area in which he moved. Does that help at all?

RMB It does, because he was specially set apart by God for that.

NCMcK You mentioned the local assembly as being representative of God; it is really the public relations that are in view in Corinth. It shows the importance of God having a company here in places where He can be known. It is not inward and secret. If it is going to represent God and be here for God, then it is important that it maintains what is due to God and is representative of Him.

RMB I thought there were the two sides. There is the inside position, involving the assembly of God as a place where God is being served, where His presence is known - what a blessed thing that men and women should have access to the presence of God. But I think what you have touched on is important. There is the public side. The assembly of God is to render a right testimony to Him; not only to what He is in His grace towards men, but what He is in His holiness. That was the need at Corinth.

PAG Would the assembly of God also include the thought of His

purpose as well as His ownership?

RMB Say more as to what you have in mind.

PAG Well, “of God” means it has its source in Him. It is of God in that He has rights over it, but it is also of God in that the thought as to Christ and the assembly had its origin in God. It does not come from anywhere else and therefore it does not take its guidance from anywhere else either.

RMB It is good to ever keep that before us. What a triumph this was. Corinth was an important city we understand in the ancient world, a great commercial city, a very affluent city. But we also understand it was a very corrupt city. What a triumph that in such a place there was a company that could be referred to as “the assembly of God”. There was a company there to which God was pleased to identify His Name and His testimony.

JTB In regard of “the assembly of God”, is it right to think of each local assembly as being a divine investment: “The assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own”, Acts 20: 28? That sense of ownership and property, as you are alluding to, seems to invoke some necessary response as to our value of it, do you think?

RMB That is what I was thinking. It is an exercise in days of smallness, it seems to me, that we do not despise what we have. We may come to the weeknight meetings and there may only be a handful of brethren, but if there is something there that represents the assembly of God, there is something that is to command my respect, something to which I am to commit myself.

JTB The tribes as encamped around the tabernacle would value their position there. Is that reflected in how we would regard the local assembly?

RMB Yes, we ought to regard it as a great privilege to be in touch with it.

In chapter 3 Paul says to this local company, “Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God”. It is implied in the way he speaks to them that perhaps they did not know it; or, if they did, that they had not appreciated it as they should have done. But we might see, in the first place, that this is what the local assembly is. The apostle has not yet got to the instruction for when the saints are gathered together. How we may experience the temple of God is a further thought. But even

before that he says to them, “ye are the temple of God”. Objectively, that is just what they were. We might ask if they were in the good of it. That is a question, of course, a question for all of us. But, objectively, that is what this local company was. It was the temple of God, and the reason for that was because the Spirit of God dwelt in them.

NJH Mr Raven speaks about the reproach of the Christ - which would be the external side - and the power of the Spirit within (vol 2 p270); that was really meant to mark this locality.

RMB Paul brings forward the cross in these opening chapters. There are two great matters: the cross of Christ - maybe that is what you had in mind - as making way for the experience of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

WMP Can you help us as to what the use of that word “temple” is in this setting? Is it intended to be an area where the Spirit has free course, free way? Is that the thought?

RMB Yes, I think that is just what it is. The idea of a temple is a holy enclosure in the midst of an unholy environment. The thoughts that particularly come to mind in connection with the temple of God are that it is the place where the presence of God is known and also, as we have often been taught, it is the place where divine light is to be received.

WMP So what would militate against that would be any feature of man's mind or the flesh. These would be intrusive matters into this area. It really is a sobering word for us. Is it your intent that we should be sobered by this?

RMB Well, we should be sobered. But I think too, we can also be revived in our appreciation of the greatness of the local assembly. It is God's temple. I would like to say that God has His temple in Glasgow. If I were in Glasgow on a Wednesday night, I know where to go to get light from God, do you think?

WMP That is most helpful, yes.

RMB What you say is important. At home we sang those words recently -

Here nature's voice is silenced,
And nature's claims give way;
The Spirit's realm commands us (Hymn 376).

And I thought to myself that is quite something; to be in the sphere

where the Holy Spirit has charge!

RB You said earlier that in the assembly God is served and He is represented. Do you think the temple of God involves the service of God as well?

RMB I think it would do.

RB I am challenged by what you are bringing before us, because Paul brings this in to remind the Corinthian saints of the level that is proper to the assembly, and the temple of God is included in that, is it not?

RMB It is good to be reminded of that.

DAB Do you think the reference in chapter 6, as to our bodies being the temple of the Holy Spirit, has a bearing on what we are saying? He says, "Do ye not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God; and ye are not your own?", 1 Cor. 6: 19. He is crediting the Corinthian saints with that. As holding our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, as we gather together, then surely our gatherings would be the temple of God.

RMB What must God's thoughts as to us be that He should take up poor sinners like us and make our bodies the temple of His Holy Spirit? What must His thoughts of blessing for us be? Oh, that that would lay hold of our hearts more!

DAB I find it amazing that the apostle Paul can speak in such language as this to the Corinthian saints when he had so many exercises. Maybe you can help us about that. He was not glossing over what was there. But this very wonderful language we are speaking of at the moment. And it is in view of establishing them and lifting them up, to give them a true idea of what they were in the divine mind.

RMB What you have just said is the main point. We need to lay hold of what we are. The apostle says, "ye **are** the temple of God". He does not say they would 'become' that. It is what they were. What a great thing it would be if in each of our local assemblies we could, in greater measure, lay hold of what we are according to the thoughts of God; and then be exercised to be true to that in practice.

SCL Do you think the Spirit coming in here brings out divine feelings as to local assemblies, what divine Persons feel in relation to the local

assembly?

RMB As we have said, it is His sphere. The temple of God is the sphere of the Holy Spirit. It is where He takes charge. We often think of the temple of God in connection with our reading meetings, though I am not suggesting it is limited to them. Perhaps we could get help together as to what is distinctive about the functioning of the temple of God, in contrast to a group of believers simply coming together to read the Scriptures.

PAG One feature would be the recognition that “God is faithful, by whom ye have been called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord”, 1 Cor 1: 9. We might, and I trust do, have helpful and valuable conversations in our houses about the Scriptures; and it is always something that certainly warms my affections when the brethren are able just to speak freely to one another about the Lord. And sisters can participate in that conversation too. But the temple involves that those who have recognised the Lord's rights in the assembly have convened for a specific purpose, would you think?

RMB That is helpful. We might illustrate it in connection with our Parliament. There are 650 members of Parliament in total. But 650 Members of Parliament do not make a Parliament. Even 650 Members of Parliament in the same room do not make a Parliament. Before the House of Commons can do its business, certain requirements must be met. For example, the ceremonial mace must be on the table. Above all, the Speaker must be present. The House of Commons cannot commence its business in the absence of the Speaker. That might serve as an illustration that, where the saints are gathered together, provided certain conditions are met, that is, they are governed by the light of the assembly and full recognition is given to the Holy Spirit, something is in existence that is greater than the sum of its individual parts. The temple of God is there.

PAG Such a gathering would normally be announced. It is covered by the anointing; it involves dignity. The announcing of these occasions for gathering means that, without placing any strictures on the brethren as to what may be possible, one would normally hope to be there.

RMB We know that in other circles it has become increasingly common to have Bible readings online. In view of what we are saying, I find it impossible to see how you could have any experience of the

operation of the temple of God in those circumstances. Do you think that is right, or is it going too far?

PAG I think that the thought of “together” (1 Cor. 11: 17) involves what the word actually means. It means being in the same place at the same time. I think we were also very thankful for what could be done by electronic means when we were obliged to be isolated from one another, but that was a temporary arrangement. And I am very free to speak to other brethren on the phone about the Scriptures. I do not have a problem with that or with a video link. But that is an informal conversation. Paul also uses the expression “in one place” (1 Cor. 14: 23) to the Corinthians as well. I think “together” and “in one place” would be the guidance that Scripture gives us.

RMB The scripture brings out that the temple of God is found in the local assembly. It is to one such that he says, “ye are the temple of God”.

TRC In relation to what has been said, there is a reason why we begin our occasions with a hymn of praise and a prayer, is there not?

RMB And what is that reason?

TRC Well, I think it links with what you are bringing before us, that we seek to gather in the light of the assembly. We respect that the temple of God is here and we relate ourselves to divine Persons in that way. But am I saying what is right?

RMB That is good. We have spoken about the temple of God as the place where the Holy Spirit has right of way: 'The Spirit's realm commands us'. Well, it needs to be a matter of definite exercise that it should be so. We do not want to assume that it is, do we? The opening hymn and prayer would help to marshal us in that way.

ARRH Is the thought of the temple that God has an avenue to speak?

RMB Yes. Say more about that.

ARRH We often speak of temple conditions, whether we understand what that means, but I wondered if when we gather together we are looking for divine Persons to be able to speak to us.

RMB That is most important. It is an exercise particularly in meetings like this, and in other occasions too, to be able to discern what the Holy Spirit may specially be drawing to our attention. Where there is the exercise that you have indicated we should be able to discern that there

is a particular line that is before the Holy Spirit. Would you go with that?

ARH Yes.

JTB The thought of the temple carries forward to the millennium. It “increases to a holy temple in the Lord”, Eph 2; 21. The assembly will be the medium for the diffusion of divine wisdom.

RMB That was anticipated in Corinth. You think of someone in Corinth, where God had worked in their hearts, and they begin to get exercised and they think, 'Where can I get light from God?'. They would be surrounded by all these idol worshippers, and there would have been the Jewish synagogue. They would want to know where they could come into touch with the true God. Paul speaks later of someone coming in and saying, “God is indeed amongst you”, 1 Cor. 14: 25.

JTB Ephesians speaks about the assembly being the manifestation of the “all-various wisdom of God”, chap 3: 10. Should that be reflected in the local assemblies?

RMB I am sure it should. How are you finding that in Edinburgh?

JTB Well, we do our best!

DS We have respect not only for the Holy Spirit, but do we have respect for one another? It is really through one another that the Spirit speaks, where two or three are gathered. Is it the Holy Spirit that uses vessels to speak, so we have respect for one another as we gather?

RMB I am glad you bring that in.

NJH In the figurative system, as long as the ark had its place, God went on with them. Is that not vital in this dispensation?

RMB What corresponds to that in this dispensation?

NJH Well, I think it is the place given to Christ in the affections. It affects every meeting. 1 Peter 4 refers to “ministering it to one another, as good stewards of the various grace of God. If anyone speak - as oracles of God; if any one minister - as of strength which God supplies; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might for the ages of ages. Amen”, v 10, 11. That is setting out the conditions that our brother was referring to. It is how divine Persons stand in relation to the company, and to one another. Is that right?

RMB I am sure that is right but, I have to say, how testing! That must

be the divine standard: if anyone speak let it be as oracles of God. That is the only speaking that is permitted in the assembly; but what an exercise, do you think?

NJH Yes, I think it is a constant one.

NCMcK In regard to what was mentioned about temple conditions, there is responsibility attached to that, is there not? “If anyone corrupt the temple of God.” There is the possibility of something coming in that is corrupting. That would attach to local responsibility. Is there any situation where that responsibility would not be taken up locally? Temple conditions must be attached to a local place, otherwise it is irresponsible.

RMB Any allowance of the flesh is corrupting, but especially in the temple of God. The thought that is emphasised in connection with the temple of God is holiness.

NCMcK Ezekiel 43:12 speaks of “the law of the house”. “All its border round about is most holy.” Holiness is the prime thought in the house.

RMB We should move on to chapter 5. In verse 7 the apostle says, “Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, according as ye are unleavened”; not as you “were”, or as you might “become”, but “as ye **are** unleavened”. The background is that there was a man in Corinth who had committed gross public wickedness. Yet the apostle speaks of them in this way. Given what was extant at Corinth, how do we understand him saying, “ye are unleavened”?

NJH According to God's work it should be true of every believer. You have to clear the gross evil. You have to clear it rightly before God.

RMB Yes, I think so.

NJH It helped me to read a remark in ministry that whatever the breakdown that has come in to the church, Christ still loves the assembly. He secured it and then sanctified it. It is good to get that order.

RMB Do you think that there might be a link between this reference, “ye are unleavened”, and what you drew attention to earlier, “sanctified in Christ Jesus”? This is what they were in the mind of God. Is Paul labouring here to help the saints to answer in practice to what they were according to God's thoughts about them?

NJH Yes. That is why we pray for recovery. If a person has erred

and lost their way in the testimony, they can come back into it at the height. They are restored to the height.

RMB It would impress upon us the necessity for what we refer to as assembly discipline. It is only by its maintenance that we can answer to God's thoughts about us in practice.

PAG Not only are we to regard the saints as sanctified, but also that the Spirit of God dwells in us. The Spirit of God does not associate Himself with mixture. He only associates Himself with what is of God. Therefore, when we look on the saints, the principal thing we should be looking for in them is what is of God. Is that so?

RMB I think so. This would help us in dealing with matters when they come up in our localities. That is not easy. We may find that local assembly exercises are perhaps some of the most trying exercises we have to face. It would help us in seeking to face them to understand that it is in view of God being rightly represented, as we were saying earlier, and that there should be the maintenance of suitable conditions for the presence and liberty of the Holy Spirit amongst us.

PAG Paul did not write to Ephesus about what was going on in Corinth. He wrote to Corinth and he expected it to be settled there. Now, of course, as an apostle there was a moment when he had to intervene, "ye and my spirit being gathered together" 1 Cor. 5: 4. He had, as it were, to act on their behalf. But because of what is available to every local assembly he expected it to be settled in that place, did he?

RMB Yes. Then, in connection with what we were saying earlier as to the universal side of things, each local assembly is bound to every other local assembly. Another thing that would help us in taking up these matters is to understand that each local assembly has its own responsibility to maintain the purity of the assembly in the place where it is.

PAG I would say, simply, that we should always be exercised to put the Lord's rights first, and to carry the confidence of our brethren in the way that we do it. If we have these things in mind the Lord will help us.

RMB He will.

TRC We often think of the way assembly exercises affect us. But I think what you are drawing attention to is that we need to feel them as God feels them. The assembly of God is a sterile area. And God feels it

if anything comes in to disturb that. We need to be attuned therefore to God's thoughts in relation to the assembly, do you think?

RMB It is helpful that you underline that. In that connection I would draw attention to the fact that he says, "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump". Not that 'ye may become' one, but "ye may **be**" one. In other words, by dealing with the evil they would continue to be what they were according to the thoughts of God. Now, I say this for the benefit of the young people: leaven is what today we would refer to as yeast. It is put into dough, and diffuses itself and causes the bread to rise. It shows that a small element of something ends up permeating the whole. The apostle is bringing out that if sin is tolerated it will change the character of the local company. Eventually, it will become something other than unleavened. Had the saints in Corinth refused to remove the wicked man, they could no longer have been owned as the assembly of God in that place. That is why it is necessary, as thinking of the preciousness of local assemblies to God, that we take up these matters in faithfulness to Him.

GH I appreciate what you are bringing up as to how things are worked out in the assembly. Assembly discipline can be very trying. The positive is that there is divine liberty at the end of it. If these things are worked out as God would see fit, brotherly love comes through and grace as well, and brethren in that locality will have liberty with one another.

RMB I think that is right. It is important to keep before us that the Lord honours right discipline, because He sees that the saints are seeking to maintain the purity of His assembly. As that is done rightly, we maintain suitable conditions for His blessed presence amongst us and the liberty of the Holy Spirit. All of that is going to help the saints. Now, there is a further thought to add to what you were saying. Right discipline means there is somewhere for persons to be recovered to. Let us say a brother falls into sin and sadly the brethren have to separate from him; if in due course God works in his heart and he comes to a judgment according to God of what he has done, he will then think to himself, 'Now, where are those persons who have that same judgment?'. And there is the circle to which he can be recovered.

DAB In the light of what we are speaking about at the moment, what is the force of celebrating "the feast ... with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"?

RMB Did you have a thought about that?

DAB You are stressing “according as ye are unleavened”. But there is also the side of maintaining our state pleasing to divine Persons; and we all know that in our own experience, as to eating the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I was just bringing that as an exercise in my own heart that I might be maintained in a state that is pleasing to divine Persons, and therefore God can see in me what is unleavened. There is the abstract side but there is also the concrete; there is the side of purpose and the side of responsibility and they go together, do they not?

RMB Yes.

DAB Help us as to that then.

RMB Well, I think the exercise is that we should be true in practice to what we are in the mind of God. “Purge out the old leaven” does not just refer to removing the wicked man, but it also involves the judgment in myself of whatever it is that has arisen among the saints. So an issue arises, a matter of righteousness arises, among the saints you referred to our responsibility but my first responsibility is to search my own heart. Am I clear of this? Then, celebrating the feast of unleavened bread would involve the constant exercise of self-judgment on our part. The Passover was held on one night, but the feast of unleavened bread went on for the next seven days, which suggests it is a continuing exercise for us.

DAB It is a healthy exercise though, is it not? It should not be an irksome thing. If we love the Lord and we give full place to the Holy Spirit, and our desires are to honour the Lord in the assembly in the places where we are set, then we would delight - we would joy - in this because it is a matter of the truth. Sincerity relates to holiness, does it not?

RMB He uses the word celebrate. “Let us celebrate the feast.” Do you not think it should be a matter of holy celebration, holy joy, that it is possible for there to be a place that is kept clean, where the Lord and the Holy Spirit can be free amongst us? That is a cause of celebration surely.

WMP Is this intended to be a lever in our souls, “our passover, Christ, has been sacrificed”. We get some sense of how divine affection and the great matter of sacrifice has entered into it, that it might be so with

us.

RMB Yes, I think so.

NCMcK The house of Chloe and the house of Stephanas would appear to have been clear on these matters, chap 1: 11, 16. It is not unreal, is it? There were persons there who were unleavened, and who were carrying this matter in exercise. Abstract does not mean the matter is unreal. It should not be unreal.

ABB Do you think these exercises we have been speaking about would contribute to the local assembly being an area of safety and salvation?

RMB I think that is exactly what they would do. Did you have more in mind as to that?

ABB Eternal salvation comes from trusting the Lord Jesus, clearly. But I have certainly known in my own experience what it is to gather in a simple way, and to see the saints go on with what is right and what is normal, what is according to God. That holds us, would you feel from your own experience?

RMB And the experience of the presence of God. What a thing that is! The saints gather together, we have referred to the opening hymn and prayer, then the meeting commences, to have some sense at that moment that we are in the presence of God, is to be greatly coveted by us. What would our times be without it!

PAG Would sincerity and truth involve therefore that I am actually real about what I hold? That is why if a matter comes up it does need to be taken up and dealt with. It is an expression of that reality. We might have the truth, but sincerity and truth means we hold it in reality. Assembly discipline is a last resort, not a first resort, but it may be a necessary resort. Given the resources in the assembly, there ought to be a great deal of effort before we get to that point to maintain the position in righteousness and to keep the person. But once it becomes public, as here, then the assembly must necessarily clear itself of the evil. The sincerity would involve that I understand the reality of what this means to Christ, and what it would mean to Christ to retain a brother if I righteously can; and what it would mean to Him to recover a brother if that is righteously possible.

RMB In all of that do you think there is a right representation of God Himself? Going back to what we were saying as to the assembly of

God in Corinth, anyone taking account of that would get a right impression of God.

NJH Unleavened bread of sincerity and truth would be in Paul's mind in the way the brother was received again into fellowship.

RMB That is a good thought.

We should speak briefly about the reference in 1 Corinthians 12: 27, where Paul says, "ye are Christ's body". I thought that was very striking because more often when we speak about the body of Christ, we think of it in its universal aspect as consisting of every believer who has the Holy Spirit who is alive on the earth at the present time; and, of course, we always need to keep that in our minds. This reference shows that there is a sense in which the local assembly can be regarded as Christ's body. Is it alright to say that?

NJH Yes. The emphatic, "ye are Christ's body": that is the local assembly.

RMB That is what I was thinking.

NJH In that way it is functioning together in unity and oneness and life.

RB Is the fact that these body feelings are in evidence a demonstration that "ye are Christ's body", both in terms of feeling for those who suffer and rejoicing with those that are glorified?

RMB One of the main thoughts in connection with the body of Christ is that it is the way in which Christ expresses Himself. He is expressed through the members of His body. Did you have more in mind?

RB It seems quite a statement, "ye are Christ's body", and so it is. But if we know something about one member suffering and all the members suffering with it, or one member being glorified and all the members rejoicing with it, then that is demonstration that this is so, and that we are Christ's body.

RMB That would enhance our view of our local companies. Let us say, by way of example, that we knew the Lord Jesus had come personally to such and such a place in Glasgow, that He was actually there in His body. For the moment that would become our commanding interest, would it not? Whatever we were engaged in would be put to one side and we would make our way there. Now, if I go to a certain address in Glasgow, I will find a company of persons of whom it can be said, That is Christ's body. Now, why should that not be my

commanding interest?

SCL In one sense it translates to the practical expressions of what you have brought out. We had recently with us as to the good Samaritan. There is fruit in what you have brought out in this passage here in Corinthians. There was a man who recognised somebody that was in need. And I was thinking of Paul's expression, "I shall most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls", 2 Cor. 12: 15. It is not just because these brethren were amicable to him, but he had an appreciation of what they were as making up the assembly.

RMB There may only be a handful of brethren but they are Christ's body. Each one of them is a member of the body of Christ. I bring these things forward, dear brethren, because I think if we ponder them carefully, they will greatly enhance our view of our local companies. How we are to be impressed with the fact that through grace we have been brought into touch with the body of Christ. A wonderful matter that!

ASP Do we see a practical working out of headship here?

RMB What did you have in mind as to headship?

ASP The Head in heaven and the body on earth, and then the feelings which are felt in the body. Is that seen in practice?

RMB I think for the truth of headship we have to go to the epistle to the Colossians. Mr Raven taught that where the figure of a physical body is used, as here, Christ is not the head, vol 9 p174. It is simply a figure: all the various parts of the body illustrating how we are not independent of one another, and how we are all to be working together to the same end. But I think in a general sense what you say is true, that the body of Christ is the circle in which His headship is to be known.

WMP Does the thought of the body imply life? Is that one of the features of a company? There would be a sense of what is living, a ministry of Christ, living affections among the saints.

RMB Yes. I think we have been taught that if the temple of God emphasises the thought of *holiness*, the body of Christ emphasises *vitality*, FER vol 16 p219.

WMP Very good, that is helpful.

RMB If we think of the light of God coming in by means of the temple of God, that light is diffused through the working of the body, would you

say?

WMP That is very fine, yes.

NCMcK So while being baptised into one body, and given to drink of one Spirit is universal, yet the experience of it largely is worked out in the local company. We merge with our local brethren, and we enjoy spiritual things with our local brethren. We understand and enjoy these things locally, to a large extent.

RMB I am glad you mention that. How we should greatly value the precious light of the assembly, and recognise that it is in God's goodness we have been brought into touch with it. But then there is something further than that, and that is the *experience* of the assembly. Now, where are we going to have that experience? It is in our local companies. Would you not say that is where we will experience the assembly?

NCMcK Very much so. All these great divine truths, while we fully accept and understand the universal aspect of them, as a matter of fact we primarily find our enjoyment of them among our local brethren where we have been set by God.

RMB That is a good note to finish on. There is nothing which Satan is so much set against as the practical expression of the assembly here on the earth at the present time. The understanding of that, and the appreciation of what we have been going over, would help us to see that in our local assemblies we have something that is well worth protecting, well worth caring for.

Glasgow

19th August 2023

List of initials:

AB Brown, Linlithgow; DABrown, Bo'ness; J T Brown, Edinburgh;
R Brown, Linlithgow; R M Brown, Strood; T R Campbell, Glasgow;
PA Gray, Linlithgow; AR Henry, Glasgow; G Henry, Glasgow;
N J Henry, Glasgow; S C Lock, Edinburgh; N C McKay, Glasgow;
W M Patterson, Glasgow; A S Pittman, Grangemouth; D Spinks,
Bo'ness

THE VOICE OF JESUS

Ewan D Speirs

John 12: 44-50; 11: 1-4, 21-26, 32-44; 5: 24-25

Luke 6: 47-49

I seek help, dear friends, to speak about the voice of Jesus. It is the only voice that is worth hearing about. In today's world there are many voices, but often they are marked by confusion. But Jesus, the One that we speak about in the gospel, the One that is proclaimed in God's glad tidings, is full of love and life and truth, and brings great clarity into the soul for those that listen and for those that have an appreciation of who Jesus is and who He was and what He has done for each one of us.

In John's gospel we read of a very dark picture in which Jesus found Himself. It says in John 12: 37 that "though he had done so many signs before them, they believed not on him". Jesus was a Man on this earth, the blessed Son of God, and He healed the sick and He gave sight to the blind and made the lame walk again. He had done many signs before these people, but they had not believed on Him. So there was a general darkness in John 12; we can see that in the world around there is a general darkness. What is around in the world is full of confusion and darkness and there is an apathy towards believers and towards the Lord Jesus. Even in this land there are many things that would bring in confusion and there is no light. In this section in John it says that Jesus cried out. There are a few references in the gospels to Jesus crying out. In them you get a sense of the urgency and the deep feelings that Jesus had as He recognised that here were men who were away from God and away from divine Persons, and that needed Someone to bring them out of this darkness; but they would not believe. And He still is appealing. He is crying out, we might say, and full of urgency.

The gospel is an urgent matter, dear friends. There is an urgency about the word. We often hear in the glad tidings that today might be the last day. There might not be another gospel preaching and we might never hear the word again. There is an urgency to the gospel that should be taken account of. You must listen to the word; you must listen to the voice of Jesus and the words He is speaking. It is a wonderful thing to know that God is still appealing in His grace and Jesus is still speaking to you tonight. He is appealing to your heart if

you are away from God. If you are away from Jesus and you do not know Him, or if you have not been listening to what He is saying to you, then this word is for you. As you heed His word you will find there is a sense in your soul that you are away from God, that you are in darkness, and you need Someone to come into your world to give you light.

Jesus says in verse 46, “I am come into the world as light”. Jesus is the only One that is the true Light. There are no other true lights in this world. There is only one Light that can really illuminate the depths of your soul as away from God, illuminate your soul and bring you back to life and bring your soul into the light. That is why Jesus is appealing to you, crying out to you. Think of what Jesus did to Paul the apostle on the way to Damascus. We can read about it in the Acts, that great light out of heaven, and the voice that was speaking down to him, “Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?”, Acts 9: 4. Perhaps tonight Jesus is speaking personally to you. He would call *you* by name. He would call you out of the darkness that you are in if you are away from God and He would bring you into this light, that you might be saved, that you might come and know Him and that you might know the love and the grace that is abounding towards you. Every single man, woman, boy and girl has sinned, and as away from God the judgment that is before each one is death; and that cannot be taken away unless you come to the One that God has provided as a Saviour for men, and that is Jesus.

Jesus walked here on this earth about 2000 years ago, as a perfect dependent Man. The scriptures that we read tonight are ones which show Jesus as in perfect communion with the Father. Indeed, you get the impression from verse 44 that the link between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ was very close; and you could say it was inseparable, for Jesus is God in Himself. He is the Son of God and in Him is power that can be taken account of and experienced by those who know Jesus and His voice. Only Jesus could say these things as coming into the world as light and taking those that were in darkness out of that place and bringing them into life.

In verse 47 He says, “if anyone hear my words and do not keep them, I judge him not, for I am not come that I might judge the world, but that I might save the world”. He has come to save you, dear friend. You have to recognise that you are a sinner away from God, and that you have need of a Saviour and by coming to Him and putting your faith and

trust in Jesus you can own Him as your Saviour and He will take away your sins forever. It is important to know what He has done to accomplish the work of redemption. He came here to this earth and walked a way of perfection. He is the only One who was a sinless, dependent Man on this earth. He walked that way for thirty-three years before He was put on a cross. On that cross He suffered at the hands of men, but too, from the hands of a holy and righteous and sin-hating God. He was made a perfect Sacrifice for you. He was the only One that died for all, 2 Cor 5: 14. I can say that He died for me, dear friend. Can you say that? Can you say that you believe on the One that died for you and trust in Him, that He has taken away your sins, and you will no longer be condemned? There is no judgment for the believer and the condemnation has been taken away forever. It is a great comfort to know that, even if you stray after you have heard His word and you have trusted Him as Saviour, the Lord Jesus does not hold anything against you. Those sins have been taken away once and for all. The moment that you put your faith and trust in Him, that is it once and for all. It is a finished perfect work that the Lord Jesus has completed, and the believer has no need to worry about your soul salvation. It is secured in that blessed One and in His finished work and the blood that was shed on that cross, the perfect redeeming work of Christ.

But there is a warning that the Lord Jesus brings in and He speaks in verse 48 about those that do not receive His words but reject them. That would be a very sobering thing, if you hear the appeal of the words of Jesus but you reject them. He says that in the last day judgment will befall those that reject His words. There will come a time when this world will be wrapped up. There will be a time of judgment for all those that have lived at any point on this earth and have not believed in the words which Jesus has spoken and the appeals of grace that are going out tonight. One day they will all have to do with God, and with Jesus as He sits on the throne of judgment. And it is a very sobering thing, dear friend, because there is no way back at that point. There will be those that have been written into the book of life or those that are destined for hell, the place where the devil and his angels will be punished, Rev 20: 11-15. It is a very sobering thing, but it should make the urgency of the gospel mean more to you, that you have a need to come and know Jesus as your Saviour. This One whom we read about here at the end of the chapter is the One whose commandment is life eternal. The words of Jesus are full of life, full of grace and full of truth. And He is the only One that could give life. And there is wonderful grace

that is still going forth tonight. It is a wonderful dispensation that we are in, a dispensation of grace where the Lord Jesus can come in and provide life and healing and reviving to your soul. If there is anyone in this room that needs revived even after they have been saved, then turning to Jesus is the answer, for there will always be a need for present salvation. We can turn to Jesus at any time, and He will listen, He will understand your situation and you can confide in Him. He will speak to you, and He will answer your prayers and will bring forth this life eternal to revive you.

I thought of reading this passage about Lazarus in John 11 to see the power that is in Jesus. This Man was none other than the Son of God. No one else could do this. Think of the wonderful work that He did here. It says in verse 4, "But when Jesus heard it, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it". Only the Son of God could perform such a work in raising the dead by His words; and this is the One that we have to do with. He can be your Saviour tonight, dear friend. You can know the certainty in believing in One who can even raise those from the dead. And indeed, we preach that He is "the resurrection and the life", as it says in verse 25. He not only died on that cross, but He was raised, and we can preach a living and raised Saviour. He has broken the bands of death and He will soon come again to take those that are His to be with Him. What a wonderful revelation this was to Martha in this section. Martha had some faith, some understanding that God was with Jesus, and she says, "whatsoever thou shalt ask of God, God will give thee", but I do not think she realised the full extent of who Jesus was. This was the One who was "the resurrection and the life". He could do all things; He was God in Himself. "He that believes on me, though he have died, shall live", and that can be the portion of your soul tonight, dear friend, if you believe. You can have this life, this everlasting life, that will go through on into eternity. It is the wonderful hope of the believer that there is this everlasting life that is for those who believe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, who has come into this world, and that is the response that Martha gives to the question posed in verse 26.

When Mary comes to Him, we see the affection the Lord Jesus had for His own. He loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus. And you can see the wonderful affections of the One that we have to do with in this passage. It even says that "Jesus wept" and that He "was troubled".

This is Somebody, dear friend, that can be your closest confidant and Someone that you can turn to at any time. This is the One that we have to do with and who could draw alongside you and sympathise with your afflictions. You can call upon Him at any time. If you come in repentance to Him and own Him as your own personal Saviour then you can have a personal living relationship with this One, with Jesus, and He is calling out today. Verse 41 says, "And Jesus lifted up his eyes on high and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me". What a wonderful show of dependence this is. Here was a dependent, perfect Man who knew completely that God the Father in heaven always heard Him in His prayers, and that can be the same for the believer. You can have One to turn to in heaven that will always hear you, Someone that can always be there for you, "but I knew that thou always hearest me". And we can see that He cried out again in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth". What a great demonstration of power that is, dear friend. Jesus can completely transform your life with His voice, with the words that are uttered from Him. And if you listen to Him and if you turn to Him and you understand what He is saying to you, then you can experience His power and what He would work in your life as well. He worked in Lazarus's life in such a great way here in raising him from the dead. We often say that if He had not said the word "Lazarus", all the dead in the tomb would have risen up as well. Such was the power that was inherent within Jesus; such was the greatness of that Man who we can present in the gospel.

What a great thing it is for us to recognise that Jesus says, "Loose him and let him go". There is nothing to hold us back, we might say, once we are saved. There is wonderful liberty and freedom that comes in from knowing that your sins are forgiven and that you can be living to God. No longer dead in our sins, we can be living to God, living to Jesus and all that He has to offer the believer, many spiritual blessings that we can enter into. It is a wonderful thing to be, we might say, let loose and be free of our sins, and knowing that they will never return to us, and they will never be laid upon us again. We are completely cleared of any sins, and we can go forth and we can approach God the Father on His throne above and be completely cleared before Him.

In John 5, I was affected by verse 25 especially after it was mentioned in one of the words at a recent burial meeting. I had never given it much thought before that the first thing that those who are

raised will hear is the voice of Jesus. This will be the portion for all those currently asleep in Jesus, for all those that have believed that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He has saved them from their sins; who have life eternal and passed out of death and into life. It is a great thing to contemplate in our hearts, that those that have been taken to be with the Lord, all the hundreds of millions of souls that have gone before, will awaken again to the sound of the voice of the Lord Jesus, "when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that have heard shall live". It is the first thing that they will hear. Do you believe that? And it says again in Thessalonians, "the Lord himself, with an assembling shout" (1 Thess 4:16); there will be that which is gathered up in a coming day, when there will be in actuality all of God's purposes, plans and councils coming to pass. There will be this great gathering up of all those that have died, all those that have gone before that have believed in the Lord Jesus, they will be gathered up by the Lord Jesus to be forever with Him, and to praise Him eternally. That is the great hope of the believer, and it is something that should anchor you in your soul. If you turn to Him and trust in Him you can see that there are works and there are purposes that are far greater than anything that man can comprehend in this world, the purposes of a divine God and Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus. There will come a day where "the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God, and they that have heard shall live"; what a day of rejoicing that will be.

Finally, in Luke 6, I thought that here is an appeal from the Lord Jesus, to hear His words and do them. It is one thing to hear the words of the Lord Jesus, but do we act on what is being said by Him? Or do we keep these things to ourselves? I think there is a great exercise and testimony that can be wrought out, dear friends, in listening to the words of Jesus and then demonstrating what He would have you to do. You can have this surety in your soul, and nothing can shake you. "He is like a man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation on the rock". The words of the Lord Jesus are full of grace and truth and instruction for each one of us. If you accept Jesus as your Saviour, you can know this great foundation. You can know this Rock, which you can build upon. You can do these things which the Lord Jesus would ask you.

There are many things that you can do: there is the remembrance of the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread. There are many other things which the Lord Jesus has asked those that are His to

do and if we do them, we have this deep foundation that will be unshakeable. And when the trials of life come upon us, and when the great rains come and the streams break upon us, we will not be shaken and that is a great assurance in the soul of each one that loves the Lord Jesus. It is a great thing to know that. We have also been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us to do the words of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a great Comforter, a great source of strength within the believer, a gift of God and Someone that we can turn to any time. The Lord Jesus begged the Father to give those that are His the Holy Spirit, that He might be with us and strengthen us while we are left here.

Well, these words have been feebly spoken but I trust that they may be for God's glory and for your blessing for His Name's sake.

Bo'ness

5th February 2023

A KINGDOM NOT TO BE SHAKEN

Archie D Melville

Hebrews 12: 18-29

Daniel 5: 5-6; 7: 13-14

Psalms 16: 8-11

Psalms 62: 1-2

I have an impression to speak of what is shaken and what is not shaken. In Hebrews we are told that we receive a kingdom that shall not be shaken. The National Earthquake Centre keeps records of earthquakes that occur throughout the world. So far in this year, 2023, there have been 20,000 earthquakes throughout the world. Some of them you would hardly notice; others appear in news headlines. You can name one or two very severe ones in Turkey and Afghanistan where violent earthquakes disturbed this earth. Buildings collapsed; people were buried under rubble; some perhaps have never even been identified or found.

You say to me, 'Why does a loving God permit such things to happen?'. It is not my place to give you an answer but all I would ask you, are you ready if such a thing should happen to you; do you realise, dear friends, that this world is shaking? This world, as Hebrews tells us, will experience a final shaking - "the removing of what is shaken, as being made, that what is not shaken may remain". This present physical creation is in a state of instability. Shaking marks this world, and I think we could also say that shaking marks every sphere of this world. Whether it is economically or politically or socially, is there anything stable in this world? Can you name anything that will remain of this present world?

What I want to tell you about tonight is that there is a King, and there is a kingdom, as Hebrews delineates, that shall not be shaken, and that is a kingdom that you and I need to be sure of belonging to and being part of. The whole purpose of the Lord's service was to announce the kingdom of God, a kingdom in this world, but which is not of it. History tells us that there were a series of kingdoms that rose and fell, the Babylonish, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian and the Roman kingdoms. They all had their day and then they went into decline. The whole physical creation is heading in the direction of eventual dissolution, 2 Pet 3: 10-12.

People are very concerned nowadays to save the planet. Do

you know, dear friends, that this planet is going to be dissolved? It is going to deteriorate and pass away, but the kingdom that I am speaking of does not pass away. It is "the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col 1: 13) and it is our desire in preaching the glad tidings that you might enter into this kingdom. To do that, in one way, is very simple: it is by becoming subject to the King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I read in Daniel because he knew about the kingdom. I will just refer to chapter 7 first because he says there he saw a vision in the night of "one like a son of man ... And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed". All the prophets bore testimony to that wonderful kingdom which is coming and it is going to be established on this earth. Morally it was established on this earth when the Lord Jesus came and it requires that you and I come into subjection to the King to enter into it.

Where I read in Daniel 5 we find a description of a king called Belshazzar and he had a great idolatrous banquet, a great feast to a thousand of his nobles, and he drank wine before the thousand and everyone was enjoying themselves, no doubt. Suddenly there "came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, and the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another". Here is an individual who is shaking; he is physically shaking. I wonder if you have ever done that, if you have ever been physically shaken in the divine presence? This man was evil in his ways, but the time had come when there was no remedy for him. The writing was on the wall. You often hear men say that, 'The writing is on the wall', which means that something is finalised and fixed. For this man the matter was fixed, he was going to die and to lose his kingdom. Everything that he enjoyed he was going to lose and not only that but he was going to lose the most important thing of all, suffer the loss of his soul.

This man was not ignorant, and there are many of us here who have sat under the sound of the glad tidings and we are not ignorant. Belshazzar knew what his father Nebuchadnezzar had told him; that he was brought down to the place of repentance; and he had bowed before the King of the heavens and recognised the One who was Almighty. In

his day he recognised Jehovah and he conveyed that message to his son. Have you heard the glad tidings before? Have you responded to the glad tidings yet? I hope you have, but if you have not maybe there will be writing on the wall. I am not pronouncing this upon anyone. I do not know your history, but for this man the matter was settled. He was shaking like a leaf and his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another. May it never be the portion of anyone to neglect the knowledge that has come to you through the preacher, through your parents, through the glad tidings. If you have ignored it till now, pay heed, listen and hearken as there is hope in this day of grace.

In Psalm 16 we find David, the writer of the psalm, speaking prophetically of the Lord Jesus and of His sufferings, death and resurrection (Acts 2: 24-28); he says, "I have set Jehovah continually before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved". Here is a Man who is not going to be moved from fulfilling the will of His Father. The reason is very simple. He has "set Jehovah continually before Him "because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart rejoiceth, and my glory exulteth; my flesh moreover shall dwell in hope". Is there hope? Of course there is hope! That is what the glad tidings is all about. It is to give you hope and stability, to deliver you from what is going to perish, what is being shaken and will pass away, to transfer you into the kingdom, God's kingdom, the Lord's kingdom. David was a man who put his trust in Jehovah in his day, and as we put our trust in the Lord Jesus we come into this wonderful, settled condition in our hearts and we are not shaken.

There are many other references in scripture, but I read also in Psalm 62 and there it says, "Upon God alone doth my soul rest peacefully; from him is my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; my high fortress: I shall not be greatly moved". There is nothing that can unsettle your soul if you have bowed and come in repentance to the Lord and confessed your lost and hopeless condition. Nothing can move you, and this psalm and many other scriptures bear testimony to the fact that persons came into the joy of their salvation by entering the kingdom that shall not be shaken.

We find in Hebrews 12 that there are two alternatives, there are two mountains spoken of, one of them is Mount Sinai and the other is Mount Zion. So you choose one or the other. Listen to the description that the writer gives as to Mount Sinai. It says, "For ye have not come to the mount that might be touched and was all on fire, and to obscurity,

and darkness, and tempest, and trumpet's sound, and voice of words; which they that heard, excusing themselves, declined the word being addressed to them any more: (for they were not able to bear what was enjoined)". That is not a very pleasant situation or place to be, at Mount Sinai. What happened there was that "Moses went up to God, and Jehovah called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel ... if ye will hearken to my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then shall ye be my own possession out of all the peoples ... And Moses came and called the elders of the people ... And all the people answered together, and said, All that Jehovah has spoken will we do!", Exod 19: 3-8.

Do you know anybody who has ever kept the law in its entirety? Have you ever kept the law yourself? Would you say that you have kept the law without any deviation whatsoever? I do not think you would say that, not if you were intelligent. Maybe if you were ignorant, but if you were intelligent you would acknowledge the law was given and resulted in death and not life. That is Mount Sinai and even "if a beast should touch the mountain, it shall be stoned; and, so fearful was the sight ...". No wonder the people did not want to hear any more of Jehovah's words. No wonder. because they were trembling and even Moses was "exceedingly afraid and full of trembling". Moses was shaking at the very thought because he knew *he* was a sinful man and if *you* do not perhaps the Holy Spirit would convict you of your sinfulness. But do you think you can approach God on the basis of what you can do, on the basis of your righteousness? That is what this scripture tells us, that the people "were not able to bear what was enjoined", and in the end if you disobeyed the law in Israel it resulted in death. There were no second chances; in Israel, if a person was taken up in sin he was stoned.

Now the writer of Hebrews says, "but ye have come to mount Zion; and to the city of the living God". Mount Zion is really Jerusalem, the city of the living God. So you have a choice; you either approach God in the belief that you can keep the law in its entirety or you can plead to the Lord for mercy that He might receive you into His kingdom. The way is as the writer tells us here, "ye have come to Mount Zion". That speaks of the mercy of God. Jerusalem was occupied by people called the Jebusites. They were the last enemies in the land and they took possession of and dwelt in Jerusalem. David went forward and defeated the Jebusites, the last enemy that would prevent the people from entering into the divinely appointed city of Jerusalem, 2 Sam 5: 6, 7.

Jesus has dealt with the enemies in the way foreshadowed by David dealing with Goliath, 1 Sam 17. He has dealt with every enemy including death itself. He has removed every hindrance and now He says if you approach this way you will enter into the kingdom, that everlasting kingdom that shall never end, the heavenly Jerusalem. "To myriads of angels": you will have the company of angels and there will be a universal gathering including all those from Abel, everyone who forms part of God's purpose and His choice. That universal gathering includes everyone: "to the assembly of the firstborn who are registered in heaven; and to God, judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, mediator of a new covenant; and to the blood of sprinkling, speaking better than Abel". The whole basis of God's redemptive work depends on the blood. There is no remission of our sins apart from the shedding of the blood. Here the writer brings it into this wonderful description that he gives us of Mount Zion - a host of things that we come to as coming to Mount Zion and to the Mediator of a new covenant.

The old covenant resulted in death; the new covenant is our way into life, our way into the presence of God, because it meets our sinful condition and our state. It deals with our sins because it is based upon "the blood of sprinkling, speaking better than Abel". Abel was the first martyr and his blood was shed by his brother Cain, Gen 4: 8. His blood did not redeem or save anyone. His blood speaks from the ground and God knows about it and hears it, but his blood could never accomplish what the blood of Jesus has accomplished and will yet accomplish. We can refer to Abel as a wonderful example of one who recognised the need for the shedding of blood because he brought an animal sacrifice. He understood the very wonderful matter that the blood is the very basis of redemption and of our being brought back to God. Therefore, he is included in this account here, but his blood accomplishes nothing for you. The blood of sprinkling of the Lord Jesus Christ can cleanse you and bring you from that state of sin and degradation, can preserve you from any danger of what is being shaken and will pass away, and it can bring you into the consciousness of this wonderful kingdom.

But here comes a warning. "See that ye refuse not him that speaks. For if those did not escape who had refused him who uttered the oracles on earth, much more we who turn away from him who does so from heaven". The speaking now is no longer on earth but comes from heaven, and the beginning of this book tells us that the voice of the

Lord Jesus comes to us from heaven. Now the shaking of this earth is the result of God's voice: "but now he has promised, saying, Yet once will I shake not only the earth, but also the heaven". This verse comes from the prophet Haggai, which I might just refer to. "For thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts", chap 2: 6-9.

These Old Testament prophets, Daniel, Haggai, Joel, Isaiah and Jeremiah - all of these persons had a vision of a kingdom to come, and this shaking is going to remove that which is not suitable for the kingdom of God. It says this will be the last, this will be the final shaking. When that time comes, which will be after the millennium, when the Lord has reigned here for a thousand years and brought in this peace that He speaks of here; "and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts", a reign of peace. Peter in his epistle tells us that the earth and all that is in it will be burned up, 2 Pet 3: 10-11. It will have fulfilled its purpose, and then what is new will be introduced. Are you going to be in that new kingdom, the kingdom of the Son of His love or will you pass into judgment as a result of this shaking?

These words are solemn and sober but I present them to you so that you might not be overcome by the shaking of this present world, that you might trust in the Saviour, have confidence in Him, find hope, and a rock that your soul may rest on, and that you will enter with joy into His kingdom.

For His Name's sake.

Glasgow

15th October 2023